

Shmanners 13: Office Etiquette

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Travis:

As you can see by my resume, I have lots of mannerly skills.

Teresa:

Yes, but do you have any podcasting experience?

Travis:

It's Shmanners!

[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. It is week two of Max Fun Drive.

Teresa:

Woo-hoo!

Travis:

When you're listening to this, this will be the fourth Shmanners episode you'll have heard in two weeks.

Teresa:

We are killing it.

Travis:

We are destroying this podcast game, son, from the inside out, brick by brick, the manners podcast that changed the game.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

It's Shmatters. Do you feel that we've changed the podcast game? Just real quick, we'll get into everything else, but—

Teresa:

Uh... Yes?

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

That is the correct answer. Um, so Max Fun Drive, in case this is the first of the four episodes you've listened to...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... uh, Max Fun Drive—

Teresa:

How could it possibly be the first of the four [laughs] episodes?

Travis:

You should go back and listen, especially the Saint Patrick's Day, that's not going to keep. That's a very timely episode.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

You need to listen to that episode like a week ago.

Teresa:

Let's get to the nitty gritty.

Travis:

Okay, so MaximumFun.org is a listener supported network. And what that means is that listeners like you are the reason the network can exist. And once a year we have a two week Fun Drive where we put the call out for listeners to support the shows that they love.

Uh, and there's lots of different levels you can donate at, and other ways that you can support. Uh, but if you're interested in supporting the shows, you should go to MaximumFun.org/donate and do so now. Don't wait. Do it. Thank you. If you've already done it, thank you for. If you're going to do it, thank you for doing it right now. So this week's episode...

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

... is about office manners.

Teresa:

It is.

Travis:

I wanted to start off with a quick rundown of my weird job experience.

[laughs]

Teresa:

[laughs] Oh.

Travis:

So we can talk about the many different offices I've been at. [laughs]

Teresa:

Oh boy.

Travis:

Uh, when I was 16, I worked in a dog kennel for two weeks before I got fired, because they didn't like my work ethic.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And then... Let's see, what else did I do? I was a waiter and a host in a hotel breakfast restaurant.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

I worked in a scene shop in college for three years.

Teresa:

So not an office.

Travis:

Well, we had a room that was also a tool room and a break room.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Uh, I worked at a Jimmy John's for three months.

Teresa:

Also not an office.

Travis:

Um, I... What else have I done? I worked at Best Buy.

Teresa:

Also not an office.

Travis:

Well, that one did have a break room. That one had a lot of, like, traditional office-y stuff. Uh, we just didn't have, like, cubicles and such.

Teresa:

All right.

Travis:

Um, I worked at Cinci Shakes, which was an office.

Teresa:

That was an office.

Travis:

And a theater. Um, and now I'm a professional pod— Oh, I also worked at a coffee shop for about six months before I got fired.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I worked at PetSmart before I quit. I worked at Sears before I quit. Um, and now I'm a professional podcaster, full-time, thanks to listeners and donors like you, to MaximumFun.org, www.MaximumFun.org/donate.

Teresa:

So you have quite a rich employment history. I however, do not. Um, I was a lifeguard for 15 years, which being 30 years old, that is half of my life.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

I worked at several different pools, um, as a lifeguard, as a swim instructor. And I also did teach lifeguarding and uh, first aid courses.

Travis:

But when you are a lifeguard, especially at the J, you had, like, an office. You did a lot of admin stuff.

Teresa:

I did. I mean, as, as you become more and more, uh, experienced as a lifeguard, you kind of move up the ranks from just sitting in the chair lifeguarding, to doing a little more administrative stuff. I was in charge of um, some swim lesson stuff. And I was a camp director for a couple summers of the swimming lesson program.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So I did do some more administrative work in there, writing newsletters and putting together lesson plans and things like that. Um...

Travis:

And you worked with me some at Cinci Shakes, so...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

... the office there.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

And you've been working the last year as a casting assistant.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Is that very office-y? I've yet to actually go into your place of employ.

Teresa:

[laughs] There is a lot of paperwork involved. Um, but mostly I would say an equivalent to what I do at the casting agency is I'm more of a receptionist...

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

... where I greet talent. I have talent fill out paperwork and I make sure that talent gets into the room, in order to be submitted for the casting.

Travis:

So here's just uh, I think from both of our working experience, our work history, one of the things you should take away is that we're going to touch on a lot of, like, general office manners and rules. But everybody's office is different. I mean, the difference between... I remember growing up and watching the like, behind the scenes of, I want to say it was like Pixar's, like, headquarters.

Teresa:

Oh yeah.

Travis:

And like, everybody had like a tiki hut [laughs] like, cubicle. And I was like—

Teresa:

Just one person, John Lasseter had a tiki hut cubicle.

Travis:

But they all had different ones. And they're all riding around on Razor scooters. And I just thought it was so cool. And that office is a lot different from, like, I don't know, a stationary office...

Teresa:

[laughs] Right.

Travis:

... with, like, three employees, so like—

Teresa:

Well, and office work in general is a very strange sort of um, micro habitat, where you spend a lot of time, but it's not your personal space. And you interact with the same people every day, but they may not be your friends.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

It's a very strange, a microcosm, that's what I want to say.

Travis:

I liked micro habitat, a...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... a micro ecosystem, a micro system.

Teresa:

Yeah. And so the way that each one works is going to be different. And it's going to be different, depending on you know, the environment that your boss creates, the environment that you create, what you do, how often you are there. I mean, there are so many factors, that it's difficult not to be general...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... when giving, um, uh, etiquette advice.

Travis:

All right, so where do you want to start?

Teresa:

I want to start, um, with the Middle Ages.

Travis:

What? Okay. Cool.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

The invention of the cubicle.

Teresa:

No, actually the invention of the cubicle is a, uh, 20th century invention.

Travis:

Oh well I was joking. I didn't think that... I'm not that dumb. [laughs] I mean, I'm pretty dumb. [laughs]

Teresa:

So pretty much the idea of an office, people working communally to accomplish a common goal, starts with monks in the Middle Ages.

Travis:

That makes a lot of sense. I can see that.

Teresa:

Right. So they were um, you know, they were pretty much isolated in their own kind of monastery, doing their thing, recording books, and illustrating, and doing it mostly in silence.

Travis:

Recording hip-hop albums.

Teresa:

Nope.

Travis:

No? Okay.

Teresa:

Nope, just books.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Okay. But even then, when they would do it, it was kind of, like, this is work, this is hard. It's not supposed to be easy.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So it was often, uh, long hours, uh, poor working conditions. It was cold and dark. And sometimes they even stood, like, the whole day doing it. There was no, like, sitting and being comfortable, 'cause it was work.

Travis:

And this isn't cubicles.

Teresa:

No cubicles.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Not yet. So then moving on, in the Renaissance, um, is when we really start to see the bigger span of kind of, like, management and clerks, and things like that, but in a smaller scale, because most of these places were still family run businesses.

Travis:

And that's when you also had, like, apprentices and stuff. Right?

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Where that was like a thing where, I— When you were like 10 or 11, your parents, like, paid to have you apprenticed to somebody.

Teresa:

But most of these were still family run businesses. And when you became an apprentice, you were pretty much, like, there. They trained you and that was what you were doing for, like, the rest of your life.

Travis:

Can you imagine? I've thought about that a lot, the difference between that and like modern day, like, how to pick a job. The idea of at like 10 your parents being like, "Hey, you're a silversmith now, and that's what you're going to do with your life."

There was no like, "Well, I just graduated from college. What am I going to do with—? I guess I'll bum around Europe for a while and think." Like, you had a job at 10 and that was the job you did for your whole life, which was, like, another 15 years.

Teresa:

Right. So like, this kind of model of boss, um, second in command, kind of, clerk, apprentice, in different scales, lasted until pretty much, um, the beginning of the 1800s.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

What do you think happened in the early 1800s to make it different?

Travis:

Uh... Are you— I can't possibly... Is it—`

Teresa:

I'll give you a hint.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

We've talked about it before and it was on one of our, um, transportation episodes.

Travis:

Was it...

Teresa:

1800s.

Travis:

1800s. Trains?

Teresa:

Yeah, the railroad.

Travis:

Yeah, nailed it.

Teresa:

Especially in the United States, the idea of an office really got underway as soon as the railroads got really big.

Travis:

Okay. Why?

Teresa:

Well, because with the railroad, you didn't necessarily have to be on the work site...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... in order to do things, because information would be passed back and forth. And the railroad was an enormous business opportunity. So it wasn't just smaller companies, it was bigger and bigger and bigger companies.

So they had to develop systems and ways of controlling these companies through bookkeeping and profit sharing and just the way that they organized the management and the middle management and the clerks. And all the kind of stuff really changed with the railroad.

Travis:

That makes a lot of sense to me. Also, I imagine that government also changed a lot over the 1800s, and that probably also heavily affected offices. That's just my guess. I don't know.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

But when you look at offices, you're probably thinking government.

Teresa:

Well, the— In general, the bigger that a group of people gets in the need to organize, the more office-like things turn out.

Travis:

That makes sense, because you need some kind of centralized hub where you keep all your records and information, and the place that you go to ask questions. You know? You need that place where when something goes wrong, you know exactly where everyone you need to talk to all at once is going to be.

Teresa:

Right. So the railroads were a really great template for this. And by the 1880s, it spread to, like, all businesses, Western Union, banking, insurance companies, all this kind of stuff. The idea of the modern office was pretty much born because of the railroad.

Travis:

Is this when cubicles, or is that still not yet?

Teresa:

Nope, still...

Travis:

Dang.

Teresa:

... still not cubicles.

Travis:

Dang it.

Teresa:

Okay, so let's fast forward.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um...

Travis:

[makes fast forward sound effect]

Teresa:

[laughs] Fast forward to the end of World War II.

Travis:

Okay, good. We skipped over a lot of bad stuff in there.

Teresa:

We skipped over a lot of bad stuff. The idea of the office doesn't really change until the end of World War II. Um, the idea of it being work and not being really comfortable and kind of working conditions are not super great, um, pay isn't super great, all that kind of stuff. So after World War II...

Travis:

Children are probably there.

Teresa:

[laughs] Children ... [laughs] No, children are probably not working in offices. They're working in, like, coal mines and stuff.

Travis:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, listen, child labor is awful, but I did just picture, like, a 10-year-old, like, file clerk, "I can't find the file." And it was adorable to me. And I'm sorry, children shouldn't work, but it is cute. [laughs]

Teresa:

[laughs] Oh my gosh. No, they were in coal mines and work houses and...

Travis:

Okay, well, you don't have to bum it out.

Teresa:

All right, all right.

Travis:

I'm picturing like little secretaries, but they're 10, and it's funny.

Teresa:

So um, by the end of World War II, we start to find advertisements for jobs labeled as friendly offices with friendly bosses. [laughs]

Travis:

That's weird.

Teresa:

And they start advertising health insurance and retirement plans, and other things to kind of, like, entice people to work for you.

Travis:

So it just means, like, it's not um, it's not just about business, that, like, we're also friends.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

And offices began to get a little more friendlier after World War II. You didn't have, you know, uh... I guess I seem to picture, you know in movies when there's like a newspaper office and there's, you know, a big room filled with big oak desks and everyone is facing the same direction, typing, hunched over their typewriters? And there's the boss man who comes out of his big, like, window lined office to, like, yell at people. That's really what I picture. But at...

Travis:

Even now?

Teresa:

No, no, no.

Travis:

Okay. I was going to say—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

You don't still picture typewriters in a modern day office, right?

Teresa:

But by the end of World War II, that had pretty much gone out the window. And guess what happened in 1968?

Travis:

Cubicles?

Teresa:

Cubicles!

Travis:

Yay! I might be the most excited about cubicles ever.

Teresa:

[laughs] So in 1968, Robert Propst...

Travis:

I was so hoping you were going to say Robert Cubicle.

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

Oh man, that would've made me happy.

Teresa:

He designed the cubicle, which is still in use throughout the United States. Um, it's a way of taking a, um, a low cost building space, and dividing it in a semipermanent way for many workers.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

I wouldn't call a cubicle office to be an open plan office, but it's a lot more open than offices used to be.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, offices were generally, um, built into a structure.

Travis:

So like tiny rooms.

Teresa:

Yeah, tiny rooms. Or one large room with several tiny rooms around it, where everybody in the middle of the room, the big room, was doing like the clerical in and out type of...

Travis:

Like the steno pool?

Teresa:

Yeah. Yeah, like the steno pool. And then everyone on the outside was kind of like the higher ranking managers who come in and yell at people.

Travis:

And also have drinks in the middle of the day and then take a nap on their couch.

Teresa:

Yes, according to Mad Men.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

So from then on, we get the open concept office. We get the table concept office, where people like, where there are large, almost picnic table like desks, where everyone kind of sits around. Um, and...

Travis:

Which I picture when I think of, like, a writer's room. You know what I mean?

Teresa:

Yeah. And offices have become a lot more tailored, depending upon what it is that the office is accomplishing and doing.

Travis:

When I... When we worked at the Cinci Shakes, uh, office, I felt like every year or so, like, we redesigned the office space, and like moved cubicles around, and like changed the half walls, and like created like big mass places where all the desks were facing each other, because we were kind of constantly trying to optimize, like, the layout for what we needed it to do.

Teresa:

Right. So that's pretty much, in a nutshell, how offices evolved.

Travis:

I see. We've got a bunch of questions from people, which we're going to get to in just one second. First, I want to talk some more about the Max Fun Drive.

Um, I want to start off by saying this; this is, you'll be hearing this on the last day of the Max Fun Drive. Um, and I'm sure that they'll, you know, extend the offer into Saturday and Sunday. They usually do.

But this is, for all intents and purposes, the end of the Max Fun Drive. And the thing is, Shmanners is a brand new show. Um, and you know, we, this is only like our eighth week going, something like that.

Teresa:

You know, it feels so much longer, 'cause we've...

Travis:

We—

Teresa:

... done so many shows.

Travis:

We keep doing bonus episodes. Um, but we wouldn't exist, if, if weren't for the model of Maximum Fun. Um, I love Maximum Fun. I've got six shows on the network. And I do that, because I love the way Maximum Fun is set up, because I can't just make shows that no one likes and make money off of them. Like, that's not the model.

Like, I don't have advertisers or sponsors paying us to do it, so it doesn't matter whether people listen or not. Like for us, I build shows that I think people will like and that I want to do, and people will seem to respond well to that. It's the reason I love podcasting in general, is it's a creative outlet that wouldn't have existed 30 years ago, 40 years ago.

And I get to do it, and I feel very lucky to exist in a time where I'm able to do the thing that makes me really happy. And I'm able to do that, because of listeners like you.

So if you listen, uh, to Shmanners, and you've listened to every episode, and you're sitting there going, "I love this show. I can't imagine a world without it." Well, thank you, and we need your support. And you can do that by going to MaximumFun.org/donate.

It's going to be a whole 'nother year before we have another Fun Drive. And this is the time to do it, because not only do you get the warm fuzzy feeling of supporting the shows you love, you also get bonuses and rewards, and gifts and stuff. And it's awesome.

Teresa:

We love those swag bags.

Travis:

You get swag.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I want to start with what you get for \$5 a month, for as little as \$5 a month, five American dollars. That's one fancy coffee drink. It's \$60 a year. If you could do that, you get access to bonus content out the ying-yang. I don't know.

Teresa:

The wazoo.

Travis:

Out the wazoo. You get so much bonus content, you won't know what to do with it, something like 70 plus hours, including a bonus episode from Shmanners where we talk about a performer from the early 1900s. It's very funny. Uh, I think you'll enjoy it quite a bit. But there's a ton of bonus content.

You'll find My Brother, My Brother and Me content, Adventure Zone, Jordan, Jesse, Go! content, uh, Judge John Hodgman, Stop Podcasting Yourself, everybody has got stuff on there. And it's not just from this year, it's from every year, and every year moving forward. Once you're a donor, you stay a donor, and you keep getting that donor's only bonus content.

Teresa:

And then for \$10 a month, you get to pick from a swanky selection of sweet bandanas.

Travis:

And they are sweet.

Teresa:

Each one, uh, has been lovingly designed to reflect each show.

Travis:

Handcrafted...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... for you the listener. So maybe you want that Shmanners bandanners. It's real cute. It's got some tiny forks on it. It's...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... it's really great. You're going to love. You can see 'em at MaximumFun.org/bandanas.

Teresa:

I love that you said Shmanners bandanners.

Travis:

Shmanners bandanners.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

And you get, um... And it all stacks, so at 10 you get that and the bonus content. At 20, you get the bonus content, you get the bandana, and you get a Max Fun Adventure necessities kit, which includes a paracord bracelet and a multi-tool with the Max Fun rocket logo right on there. You get a little packet of hot chocolate. You get...

Teresa:

A little packet of toilet paper.

Travis:

A little packet of toilet paper, um, for emergencies in camping situations. Um, and all of that is yours for only \$20 a month. And that goes a long way to support the shows that you love.

Um, for \$35 a month, you get all of that stuff, and you get the Max Fun rocket thermos. It's beautiful. Uh, it comes with a tumbler. It's going to keep your hot drinks hot. It's going to keep your cold drinks cold and probably your medium drinks medium. Get that perfect balance of hot and cold. You'll stay there forever. For. Ever.

Teresa:

A long time. Don't hold us to forever, please.

Travis:

No, asterisk.

Teresa:

[laughs] Asterisk.

Travis:

Asterisk. Um, but all that's yours for \$35. There's some other levels and there's lots of great stuff, and we'll tell you more about all the other stuff, but suffice to say, let me say this, thank you.

Uh, even if you can't donate, even if you're sitting here, listening, going, "I would never donate," you're listening to this show, and that makes you very

special to me. So thank you very much. I really appreciate you listening to Shmanners. I love the support that we've had so far.

Any time we launch a new show, it's very scary, because we put a lot of work into making it, and then if people don't like it, it's a bummer. But you all seem to like it, and that makes us so happy, so thank you. Now let's get to some questions from you, the special, special listener.

Teresa:

I would like to make a small caveat before we get to questions.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

A lot of people, when they ask questions, especially about this sort of topic, seem to already know the answer that they want, because a lot of these questions, a lot of questions about manners in general, are about what should I do if another person is blank.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

I just want to put out some blanket statements and say that most people understand what it takes to get along with people in an office setting. But there is always going to be someone whose interpretation is different from yours.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

And the best way to take care of that is politely, calmly, with facts to back up what it is that you need, talk to that person specifically. And then if the matter cannot be resolved, take it to the HR manager. Take it to a co-worker that you both respect and admire. Take it to your boss.

Travis:

Take it to the people's court.

Teresa:

[laughs] The communication is really what I want to hit on hard there, because some— Your expectations are all different.

Travis:

It's also important to note there, you did that in the correct order, which is, don't escalate it to, like, a boss or supervisor, before you've addressed it with the person.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, okay, so here's uh, a wide assortment of questions from listeners like you. This is from Melissa. "Office emails, if you are sitting next a person, is it really okay for them to email you?"

Teresa:

It depends on the situation. Um, there are two situations where I can think that it is okay. One, they may not want to bother you if you're doing a very complex project. And an email is a brief way of asking what they want, without inviting conversation.

And two, if it is something that requires a paper trail. Um, maybe they want it to be seen, that they have asked you this question or they have talked to you about it, so um, then it's not your word against theirs, and email is very helpful in that.

Travis:

And maybe it's not so much as like their word against yours, so much as like, they don't want you to forget, so they're giving you a like, reminder, that you can like...

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

... look back and see what they asked.

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

Uh, but I think there are also definitely circumstances in which, if they're just like, "Could you pass me the stapler?" And they emailed you that, that's real weird.

Teresa:

[laughs] That is kind of weird. Um, so every other circumstance, not every other, most other circumstances, I would say you probably don't need an email for it. But if there's a need for a paper trail, that's a good way to do it.

Travis:

Uh, this question is from Jeevesy on Twitter. "To what degree is it acceptable to customize/decorate your workplace, a cubicle or desk, not shared, but in view of others?"

Teresa:

Um, a lot of offices have very specific decorating policies. Um, I would say, uh, pictures of friends or family members or pets, um, as long as they are small and tasteful and don't take up the whole wall, um, small toys perhaps, but if anything, like, falls over when you move stuff around your desk, it's too much.

Travis:

And if you have anything that's, like, moving or, like, battery operated or responds to sound and you can hear it click, that's probably bad. That's probably something that's going to slowly drive your coworkers insane. Um, also, if you decorate with, like, posters or anything, even if it's a very, like, cool, laid back work environment, uh, and it's where the phrase came from, keep it safe for work. Right?

Because what you don't want to do, especially in decorations like that, is you don't want to encounter a circumstance where there's 10 people in the office, nine of you are totally cool with the thing, and one person is made uncomfortable because maybe it's an explicit image, or I don't know, like a babe on, like, a hot rod or something.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

And they're like, "I don't like that. But now I feel uncomfortable, because I'm the only one here who has a problem."

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

So try to keep that in mind. And don't like, don't do anything too visually challenging I would say, or distracting. This is a question from Ryan. "Why do people think it's okay to cut their nails in the office?"

Teresa:

If I were to answer that question exactly, [laughs] it's uh, they think it's okay to cut their nails in the office because they spend a lot of time in the office. And it becomes kind of like a second home. But personal grooming chores should really be left to at home.

Um, with the exception of it you arrive very early and you want to, like, re-brush your teeth throughout the day, um, that, that can be an exception. Or um, re-applying deodorant in the bathroom, those sorts of things should be taken into a more personal space like the bathroom, or kept at home.

Travis:

You know what you should do? This, I just, this is such a good idea you guys.

Teresa:

What?

Travis:

Oh God, buckle up, this is a good one. You know how you're not allowed to smoke in the buildings anymore, you got to step outside to take a smoke break?

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

You should step outside and take a nail clipping break.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Sit down at the little bench or picnic table, whatever they have set up for smokers out there, clip your, take 10 minutes, clip your nails, come back in. Why should the cigarette smokers be the only ones that get the 10 minute break?

Take a shoes-off break. There's another question we had. "Why do people take their shoes off in the office?" Go outside. Kick your shoes off. Grab some grass with your toes. Come back in. Do it outside, you animal.

[laughs]

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I do agree, but also, Ryan, to that point, and to Teresa's point earlier, maybe one of the reasons they think it's okay is no one has said something. Everyone is looking at them going, "Surely they have to know that what they're doing is wrong." But if they did, they wouldn't be doing it.

And also, that's your opinion. I mean, don't get me wrong, I agree with you. I don't think the office is the place for that. But they might have different feelings and opinions, and if no one says anything, like, you can't assume that they're doing it maliciously.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

So maybe say something and just say like, "Hey, uh, would you mind, like, not bringing that to the office? Like, I don't feel like this is the appropriate place for that." And, like, at least giving them the chance to be like, "Oh, sorry, I didn't know this was bothering anyone." Oh, this is a good one.

Teresa:

Hit me.

Travis:

This one is from Jay on Twitter. "Company policies aside, how should office romances work?"

Teresa:

Office romances should not take place in the office. Um, if it is uh, allowed by your company policy and you strike up a relationship with someone from the office, everything that has to do with your relationship and not... doesn't have to do with work, should be kept outside of work, because even calling someone a pet name, honey or sweetie, uh, can be seen as, um, diminutive or um, giving favors, or, or any other things.

That relationship should take place completely away from work. And I know that, like, on TV and movies they make it all fun, people sneaking around and holding hands under tables and stuff. But if you both want to keep your jobs, it's important that you keep it out of the workplace.

Travis:

And that you, you know, tell your boss, or that you go and, like, that you're not hiding it.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Uh, especially if that's against company policy. It's also important to note that you go into it understanding that there's a layer that if you should break up, especially if it ends very badly, that like, you still have to see them at work. So that's a definite wrinkle that you always have to keep in mind when you do it. And then you can't let that affect your job or their job. You don't want...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

So just be careful going into it. Um, this is from Carrie on Facebook. "I work at home. Do I need to change out of my pajama pants or no?"

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

And the reason I like this question is, I also work from home. And even before I did, I used to have conversations with Griffin, who has worked from home for a long, long time. And Griffin makes the point that one of the things that really has helped improve his productivity from working from home, is that he set up a schedule like he was going to—

Like, he would wake up in the morning and he would, you know, take a shower and get ready like he was going to work. And he would sit down to do his work. And then at a certain time, like, 5:00 or 6:00, the work day was done. And then he could, like, go off through the house.

And I feel like there is a certain amount of that that I like. But that's what works for me and what works for Griffin. It may not work for you. I don't think you have to, but I think at a certain point, I think productivity kind of suffers if you don't...

Teresa:

Well, working—

Travis:

... eventually get out of your pajamas.

Teresa:

Working from home is a highly personal thing, um, because like you said, it really just depends on what it is that gets you going and gets you ready for work. Maybe she has a different pair of pajama pants that she puts on, other than the ones that she was sleeping in.

Travis:

Work pajamas?

Teresa:

Work pajamas.

Travis:

Ah, I love this.

Teresa:

[laughs] So...

Travis:

I kind of want that now. That looks like— There is a pajama suit. That does exist.

Teresa:

I have seen that.

Travis:

I've thought about that. I've thought about having a pajama suit to change into for the home office. [laughs]

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I think that's a good look. I could get it embroidered on the back that says like, Travis' pajama suit. I know that's not very creative, but anyways.

Teresa:

We digress. Um, so whatever works for you is what you need to do. Um, I do recommend that you look, that you are at least dressed enough to answer the door.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, because if, if there's a delivery or someone shows up unexpectedly, you're probably going to want to bring them inside. [laughs]

Travis:

Um...

Teresa:

So you should be dressed appropriately to answer the door.

Travis:

This question is from Sophie. "Is there a sharing/oversharing line? Where is it?"

Teresa:

Hmm... Um, I mean, we talked about earlier how you're going to spend eight or nine hours of your day with these people who may not necessarily turn out to be your friends after work.

Um, so I think that the normal pleasantries, the, "How are you? How was your vacation? How are your kids?" Are, are pretty much what's acceptable, unless you develop a stronger relationship with specific people, um, that includes out of work time.

Travis:

And also, it's important to keep in mind um, when you're in, like, shared spaces, like say a break room or like a conference area or something, to keep in mind that probably everyone can hear you.

That was a question we got a lot, um, and basically, non-specifically, the question was something along the lines of like, "What do I do when someone tries to talk to me and I'm just trying to, like, take my break or whatever?"

So let's answer it from the other side, which is, if you walk into, like, the break room and someone is just hanging out and, like, staring at their sandwich and trying to just zone out for five minutes and forget that they're at work, you should probably leave those people alone.

Teresa:

Right, yeah.

Travis:

You should probably just let them have their minute. I remember when I worked at Best Buy, trying to, like, lay down, and just not take a nap, but just, like, close my eyes, laying down on the break room couch. And this guy just, like, kept talking to me. And I was like, "What more could I be doing to demonstrate to you that I am not looking to engage right now?"

Teresa:

Yeah, I think that that was probably his inability to see those social cues.

Travis:

Yeah, so just be ready for that. You know, and somebody else asked, um, Space Debris on Twitter asked, "If I don't have to interact with my coworkers to do my job, am I obligated to do so, instead of listening to podcasts all day?"

Teresa:

[laughs] I see what you did there.

Travis:

Yeah?

Teresa:

I see what you did there.

Travis:

I do think it's important to note though that like, there is something to be to said, that even though you don't have to be friends with these people, it doesn't hurt.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Like, I— Michael Bradbury, one of my best friends, I met at work. And like, there is something to be said about making friends with the people you work with. Man, working at Cinci Shakes, I loved all those people.

And like, uh, we, sometimes, you know on a slow Friday, would just end up, like, sitting around the conference table for four hours eating donuts. And it was wonderful. It was super great. So having friends at work and kind of choosing to, like, say, "Even though we wouldn't be friends if we met outside of here, here you are my work friends." Can make the day go by a little bit better, can make everything a little bit brighter.

Teresa:

And the other half of that question about the podcast, is a lot of workplaces do allow you to listen to music on earbuds. Or if it's a very quiet radio, have a radio at your desk, or something like that. And um, I think that the way that you negotiate that and working with coworkers, is it needs to be at a low enough level where you can discern if someone is speaking to you...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... um, with the headphones on, or with your radio on. Uh, because if people feel like you are unapproachable because you always have your headphones

in, it's not going to be, it's not going to create a really, uh, welcoming work environment.

Travis:

We have a bunch more questions that we're going to get to in a second but first, I want to talk some more about the Max Fun Drive. So we mentioned before the \$5, the \$10, the \$20, the \$35. If you are interested in upgrading and you're a \$35 donor, or any of those levels and you're looking to move up, but you're not ready to move to the \$100 level, there is a secret level for upgrading donors. That was probably the boldest I've said the word secret level in any...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

There's a secret level for upgrading donors that you can move from 35 to 50, um, so you don't have to make that jump up. Because that's the other thing, we're looking for new and upgrading donors.

So maybe you've been a \$5 a month or a \$10 a month, and you're ready to give a little bit more, because there's a lot of new shows on the network that you listen to, great, you can do that. You can do that by going to MaximumFun.org/donate. But say Teresa, I'm ready to do \$100 a month, along with all the other stuff that we already talked about, what would that get me?

Teresa:

Well, that gets you into the Max Fun Culture Club...

Travis:

That sounds cool.

Teresa:

... where Max Fun hosts and contributors pick different media entertainment sources, sure. [laughs] Uh, there's really just a lot of stuff that they will send to you on a monthly basis, books, music, movies. [laughs]

Travis:

Lots of stuff. There's lots of stuff and usually it's someone going, "You know what I think everyone would like? This graphic novel." Or something. And then you get sent that. It's a really cool way to get kind of exposed to some art that maybe you wouldn't normally. And we've got a lot of cool people on the network. And they're going to pick some really cool stuff for you.

Teresa:

And then at the \$200 a month level, you get automatic registration for Max Fun Con.

Travis:

Now that's Max Fun Con 2017. Let's be clear.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

That's not this year's Max Fun Con.

Teresa:

Not this year, next year's.

Travis:

But that's amazing, 'cause Max Fun Con sells out really quickly, and it's super fun. We've been a couple of times. We always have a great time, and you will too. And you know what? Not just that, that \$200 is going to go a long way to support the shows that you love.

And there's some other stuff you can do. Like we said, you know, we're winding up the Max Fun Drive, but there's still time left. Even if you weren't able to donate and you can't afford it, I get that. We've all been there. I've definitely been there. I talked about getting fired from those jobs before [crosstalk]...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

So if that's the case, tell everybody you know. Go on Facebook, go on Twitter, share that link, MaximumFun.org/donate with the hashtag #MaxFunDrive.

Say, "Hey, I can't, but you should support the shows." You can also tweet with #ToastToMaxFun, along with that link, MaximumFun.org/donate and a reason that people should support the network. And you're going to get entered into a drawing for, I have it I think confirmed now, that it's a toaster oven, John Hodgman's favorite Breville product.

Teresa:

Woo-hoo!

Travis:

Um, also if you're listening to this on Friday the 25th, tonight we're going to be doing a livestream Jordan, Jesse, Go! I believe you can watch that on MaximumFun.org. Or at the very least, you can find the details for it, so you should do that, 'cause I'm going to be on it and I think it's going to be great. It's probably going to be...

Teresa:

I'm sure it's going to be great.

Travis:

It's going to be great. You're going to love it. Um, and we have challenge donors, so every time there's a new and upgrading donor, we have a wonderful group of supportive people who have committed to giving a little bit extra, you know, anywhere from like a penny to a dollar per new and upgrading donor. And it's awesome! And we appreciate it. We appreciate everyone. Now Teresa...

Teresa:

Yes?

Travis:

... I want to get to our elbows on the table question.

Teresa:

On boy.

Travis:

This was one third of the total questions we received, was this question.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

The microwave.

Teresa:

Oh man. That kitchen area, it does really get people's goat, doesn't it?

Travis:

Well, and it ranged from, like, people microwaving really smelly stuff. Or what do you do when somebody, like, puts their thing in the microwave and then leaves for some crazy reason, and then it finishes, but you're waiting to do your thing?

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

And— Ugh. That microwave, it's a real, like, dead man's cove. It's so dangerous to navigate. What do we do? How does it work? What do I do with it?

Teresa:

Okay, so because the microwave is a commodity that almost everyone in the office is going to want to use during the day, um, it's important that you keep your trip short.

Um, I know that there are certain microwave dinners that take you know, five to seven minutes. Maybe steer away from those. Keep things to under

five minutes, um, because there are a lot of people who need to use that microwave. If you make a mess in the microwave, you got to clean that up.

Travis:

Especially since as people keep using it, that's just going to bake on.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Do it right away and it's so much easier to clear, you guys.

Teresa:

And you do need to stay in the kitchen while your food is being microwaved, uh, because, as soon as it's done, you got to take it out so the next person can use it.

Travis:

That's true. And here's the other thing, as long as we're talking microwave, let's talk refrigerator.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Label your stuff.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

And don't, uh, when, at Cinci Shakes, our policy was, like, take it home with you. And if you brought something that's like, well this is like my meal for like the week, that's one, taking up a lot of very precious real estate, but two, okay, great, take it home with you at the end of Friday, because anything left through the weekend would get thrown away.

Teresa:

But yeah, there are different office policies about that. Um, if you have say, a six pack of soda, you may, you should really only keep two in there at a time and replace when you, when you take one out.

Um, because like you said, there's a lot of people who need to put their lunches in there. Everything should be labeled if you don't want to share it, because sometimes people will buy a gallon of milk and if it's not labeled, it becomes office milk.

Travis:

Speaking of sharing, if you bring in food to, like, put on the conference table, "everybody have a homemade cookie," take the dish or whatever is left at the end of the day, home with you.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

Because otherwise you're just assuming someone else will take care of it. And that's never good manners. You know, here's a little helpful hint, uh, if you're someone who cares about, like, people should label their food. Get a piece of string, tie it on to the handle of the refrigerator, tie a Sharpie onto it, tape it on there. That way there's no excuse for why something wouldn't be labeled. There's a Sharpie right there for them to write with.

Teresa:

Oh, that's a great idea.

Travis:

Thank you. I liked it a lot too. Um, and if you spill something in the refrigerator, clean it up. And don't eat other people's food. Like that, I shouldn't have to say that. Don't eat other people's labeled food, you jerk.

Teresa:

[laughs] Yes.

Travis:

You're probably not. If you're listening to Shmanners...

Teresa:

You're probably not listening to—

Travis:

... you're probably not a food stealer.

Teresa:

No, no.

Travis:

You're probably fine.

Teresa:

Um, also there's the idea of perhaps smelly foods.

Travis:

Oh, yes.

Teresa:

It is pretty uncouth to take something that before even being microwaved smells badly.

Travis:

But what if it's the food you have? This is the thing. I agree with you, but like if I made leftovers the night before and maybe I don't have the money for, like, a huge variety of food, leftovers are what I got for lunch, sometimes that happens.

Teresa:

Odds are that your leftovers don't smell bad before you even get them in the microwave. I'm talking, like, fish and, like, rotten broccoli and you know, those kind of things.

Travis:

Okay, I'll give you that.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

So don't bring rotten broccoli to work.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Fun story, I did that once. [laughs]

Teresa:

[laughs] If it smells...

Travis:

Can I tell the whole story?

Teresa:

Oh my goodness.

Travis:

I was working, we were building, rebuilding the stage at Cinci Shakes and I smelled so bad. And I just assumed that it was, like, because I was working my third 20 hour day in a row. And I was, like, spraying myself down with Febreze and then came to discover that in my pocket was a bag of, like, two day old rotten broccoli.

Teresa:

No, four to five day old rotten broccoli.

Travis:

I had been working really hard. It was a really chaotic experience, and like I wasn't really— I was just, like, sleeping on a couch upstairs between days. And I wasn't taking good care of myself. [laughs] And I had broccoli in my pocket.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

[laughs] It was very upsetting, so don't do that.

Teresa:

Don't do that.

Travis:

And you know, also, I think it's one thing if it's like one time, once a month. Like you brought in a thing, you microwaved it and it was like, "Ugh, that smelled a lot stronger than I thought," versus every day, five days a week, bringing in something smelly. You know what I mean?

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Don't make it a habit.

Teresa:

And you know some offices even have um, policies against things like popcorn, 'cause...

Travis:

Yeah. Man, you burn that stuff.

Teresa:

Well yeah, 'cause the smell is very pervasive.

Travis:

What about, like, pleasant smells? Like, say you know like uh, one of those, like, wax melters, or, like, scent diffusers or something like that? Or even perfume and cologne, we had some questions about that too.

Teresa:

Um, perfume and cologne is another very office specific thing, because a lot of offices have no scent policies. Um, so anything other than deodorant, you can't put it on.

Um, I would say that unless it is unanimously agreed upon, that like a Scentsy or a wax melter or something is something that you guys all want, you probably shouldn't have it in the office. It just takes that once person who's asthmatic or gets sick easily or gets nauseated...

Travis:

Yeah, that's a real bummer. And it starts to mingle with, like, the taste of, like, their food. Uh, also, just good rule of thumb as far as cologne and perfume goes, the rule I've always heard is that it should only be able to be smelled when in a lover's embrace.

Teresa:

Oh my.

Travis:

Yeah, Griffin taught me that. It was real weird.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

It was a real weird thing to hear from my little brother. But you shouldn't be able to smell, like if you can smell your cologne from across the room, you're wearing too much.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

And you're not putting it on right. You got to spritz it in front of you, and then walk through it, like you're entering into a cloud, not directly on you.

Teresa:

At home. You need to do that at home.

Travis:

Do it at home. You are correct. Oh, this is a good one. Okay. I almost missed one. This is from CW on uh, Twitter. "How do I ask a coworker not to loudly watch Netflix on their phone every single break in a common space, without offending?"

And the reason I like this is, I used to run into it because we had a TV in the Best Buy break room, and you'd come in and somebody would be watching like a horrible show or something, like, crazy. Or someone would, like, have it turned off and they'd be trying to nap and it'd be like, "Okay, but, like, everybody gets to watch this if they want to." So, like, it goes both ways. Right? The shared space, how do you deal with the media?

Teresa:

Right. Well, it's different if there's a television in there that everyone is watching. That should be placed with a consensus of these are the shows that we will watch. These are the channels that we put on. Um, and if someone wants to watch the TV, I guess you can't nap in there, or you have to... I don't, I don't know. That's a really specific thing that I think you need to work out with your coworkers.

I can't tell you what to do because I am not all of those people. Um, but when it comes to watching Netflix on a personal device, I think just like a lot of our, um, questions about watching it on planes and, and subways and, and you know, in a social environment, you got to ask them to put their headphones on. And a really nice way to say that is like, "Would mind putting your headphones in to watch Netflix? I'd like to chill out in the quiet for a few minutes."

Travis:

Yeah, the different options of what happens when that, when you say that like, "Hey Derek, would you mind putting your headphones in? I just need to— I just need a minute to chill out." You know what I mean? Like I don't envision Derek turning around and smacking you in the face...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... and saying, "I will watch House of Cards whenever I want to, however I want to!"

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Maybe Derek is real charged up from House of Cards.

Teresa:

Maybe.

Travis:

I don't know, but I don't think that that's going to happen. So yeah, there's a lot more questions that we received, but as I'm looking through them, a lot of them are, "How do I deal with someone else doing something terrible?" And I think if that's the case, do as Teresa said, communicate your concerns to them.

Say, "Hey, could you maybe try such and such?" Um, and if that doesn't work out, then think about escalating it to another level. But I think most people that listen to this show or write in, understood, like, that these were things that they knew they shouldn't do.

But if you have any more questions, if there's anything where you're like, "I have no idea if it's okay if I do this," you can always tweet at us, uh, @ShmannersCast or @TravisMcElroy @TeresaMcElroy.

Or you can just, like, look at your company policy, talk to, like, whoever the HR person is. Or here's a little secret tip from me to you, set up like a secret complaint box thing, and then no one ever has to know that you have the problem with clipping their nails.

Teresa:

I don't know about secret complaint box.

Travis:

No, even as I said it, I actually don't like that idea now that I said it out loud.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

'Cause then it just leads to someone going, "Who said the thing about me watching House of Cards in the break room?" It's so much better... Listen, we're adults. You have a job. You're an adult. Adults deal with this stuff.

I think everyone appreciates being treated like an adult. And I think that direct, honest, not rude, not heated, just direct communication always helps in the workplace. And also, you have to be ready to give a little, because I guarantee there's something you do that annoys someone you work with.

That's just how it works. You work in the same office, you see each other every day, I guarantee you annoy somebody there. Everybody annoys somebody at work. You have to be willing to give a little bit and be like, "Well, that's just Derek. Uh, I just know that about him. And you know who can really control how I feel about that? Me." And you just let go of it.

Teresa:

Travis and I don't even work together all day and there's stuff that he, he does that annoys me.

Travis:

That's true. So help support MaximumFun.org so I can continue to love my wife in the coming year...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... and keep recording Shmanners. But thank you so much for listening to this episode. Um, and thank you for listening to Shmanners. Thank you for supporting Maximum Fun. MaximumFun.org/donate we're not going to hit it again, uh, you know, thank you so much. It's been a really great Max Fun Drive. And I'm actually sad it's over. I love the Max Fun Drive. I love seeing everybody talk about the shows. Um...

Teresa:

You love an excuse to tweet every 20 minutes.

Travis:

Oh, just every single joke that pops into my head?

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

Yes I do. Um, if you, if you like this show, and I assume you do because you're listening, please do us a favor and share the link that we tweet out for every episode. Tell people to check it out.

Maybe play this episode in your office and say, like, "I think everyone would like this. Check it out." Um, you know, go on iTunes, rate, review, subscribe. Um, yeah, and watch the livestreaming Jordan, Jesse, Go! tonight. I think that's enough. I don't want to sit here and bore you any more. Thank you so much for listening. I love you.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

There, I said it.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

I think you're great.

Teresa:

All right.

Travis:

That's going to do it for us this week. 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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