

Shmanners 398: Online Reviews

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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: Better today. Yesterday, lots of—lots of drainage. Lots of coughing.

Travis: Lots of snots.

Teresa: Problems with my voice. But today, today is a new day, and I am on the mend. I am back to I think baseline. This is about right. I'm maybe still a little congested, but...

Travis: I think you sound beautiful, melodic... um, angelic, one might say.

Teresa: Oh, hmm, thank you.

Travis: Um, and I'm... my usual 110% self. Every day is a gift, and, uh, just walkin' on sunshine, oh, oh, oh.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And I'm starting to feel good.

Teresa: Alright!

Travis: I went to the chiropractor this morning. It's just—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's all better.

Teresa: How would you review your chiropractor?

Travis: Five stars out of five.

Teresa: Nice! That's a great review.

Travis: Uh, yes. The building did [laughs] spook me. Early in the morning I looked out and I was like, "Oh, this is a big, scary, old-timey-looking building." But inside, very nice. Loved it. Loved the decor. They were playing some good music. I had a great time.

Teresa: Uh, would you be willing to review online?

Travis: No, absolutely not. I never do that.

Teresa: You never do that.

Travis: I never think about it.

Teresa: That's what we're talking about this week.

Travis: I know!

Teresa: Online reviews specifically. Now, we do have another episode about reviews, and we talk more about the art of critique in that episode. Please go back and listen to it. But I mention in that episode that in order to be a critic, you need to have knowledge and taste of the subject, right?

I talk about how it's important that you love the form more than you love the creator, that you are able to see past kind of, like, the surface level, and expound upon how you're affected, and all that kind of stuff, right?

For, like, people who love—

Travis: But not if you're reviewing, like, a small diner. Than you can just be like, "I don't know, man."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "It was the weirdest tuna salad I've ever had in my life."

Teresa: Right. So we're talking today specifically about online reviews of things like products and diners or, you know, places like that. Like, what a person who maybe isn't a critic... the challenges and history of reviews from those perspectives.

Travis: Okay. So online reviews started back in 1632.

Teresa: Nope. Nope.

Travis: Uh, 1995.

Teresa: Uh, somewhere between those two dates.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, first of all... way back—way, way back—you may not have had a choice, depending upon where you lived, to be a patron of a business.

Travis: Oh, I see. So it's like there was one hardware store, there was one restaurant—

Teresa: [simultaneously] One butcher.

Travis: One—yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, one restaurant, one place to go get your hair cut. Like, there—it doesn't matter how bad it was. If you had to go there, you had to go there.

Travis: That was it.

Teresa: That was it.

Travis: If you didn't like it, you needed to move to a different town where there were other businesses.

Teresa: Or start your own.

Travis: Or start your own.

Teresa: Right? That's a possibility. But the reviews didn't have a lot to do with the business kind of, um, structure.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because even if it was bad, that was the only one. [wheezes]

Travis: It was usually like, uh, "Hey. Don't get the tuna surprise." That's the second tuna. Let me go a different way.

Teresa: That's the second tuna.

Travis: "Don't get the... broccoli surprise," or whatever, 'cause the surprise is there's no broccoli in it, or whatever. Right? It would be like, "This is what you want to get at that restaurant. Don't get anything else." Right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Um, but then we get to the 19th century, and this is when we start to see a rise in newspapers, okay?

Travis: Ooh, okay.

Teresa: And not only is there the newspaper that is a great way of spreading information, they also need something to put in the newspaper.

Travis: Yeah, that's true.

Teresa: And the more newspaper—

Travis: They can't sell a blank one.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It can't be like, stuff on the front, and then you open it like, "I can't wait—wait a minute. There's nothing else in here."

Teresa: I mean, single page editions are fine. But, you know, they want to sell more papers, so they want information to put in the papers.

Travis: Well, the newsies are out there. They're working hard. They gotta sell the papes.

Teresa: I know. Several editions a day sometimes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so one of the things that started popping up are reviews of businesses and such, which at first were probably treated more like gossip columns than anything else. But, you know, as it gets more and more formalized, we get to respect these things a little bit more.

Now, it's not the only time that we see kind of reviews in print, and we've talked about this, like I said, in the other episode.

In the 19th century France, Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimod de La Reynière.

Travis: The name just keeps goin', huh?

Teresa: [laughs quietly] Yeah. He was a food critic.

Travis: I'm not sure which of those were separate names and which were just... hyphenated, maybe? Is it all—is it five different names?

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah. Look.

Travis: Don't hold your phone so close! Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimod de La Reynière.

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: Reynière.

Teresa: Um, and so he published The Gourmand's Almanac to give foodies advice on which restaurants to eat in France.

It was several tomes, okay? There were a lot of restaurants at the time. Um, but it was—

Travis: Not like now.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: There's only the one in France, but it's huge!

Teresa: It was more of a guidebook, right? Than, like, a formal review. Um, but then... once we have the newspapers, you can now have this widely read, inexpensive source for news, right? And here's the thing, right? New York Times...

Travis: I've heard of it, yeah.

Teresa: ... published their first restaurant review on January 1st, 1859.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That seems so late to me. But... you have it. There it is. The reviewer themselves wished to remain anonymous, being described as only a strong-minded reporter of the Times.

Travis: It was Abraham Lincoln.

Teresa: Probably not.

Travis: Uh, but it could've been! 1859? Could've been!

Teresa: Probably not.

Travis: You don't know, though!

Teresa: The piece begins—

Travis: He was honest. He was known for his honesty. I bet he ate food.

Teresa: Occasionally, I assume.

Travis: Yeah. I'm saying, it could've been Abraham Lincoln.

Teresa: It begins with the assignment, as given to them by the editor. It says: "Dine somewhere else today and somewhere else tomorrow. I wish you to dine everywhere, from the Astor House Restaurant to the smallest description of a dining salon in the city, in order that you may furnish an account of all of these places."

And in the article it was admitted that the paper would be paying for the dinners.

Travis: Hmm.

Teresa: And so it kind of set this precedent about—

Travis: President?

Teresa: No!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It set a precedent about reviewers remaining anonymous, which is not something that we really have today, as far as online reviews.

Travis: Eh.

Teresa: You have to publish an email address, usually, or you have to have an account to log in to things like Yelp and things like that. So you—

Travis: Yeah, not anonymous like no one can figure out who you were, right? But anonymous in that you can make your screen name something else so that you could review it.

Teresa: Right. You don't have to be associated with it, but you are traceable.

Travis: Well, I mean, this reporter was traceable at the time if you went to the paper and said, like, "Hey, who was it?" [pause] I'm saying, you can't say there's no anonymity on the internet when you review a place, right? Like, I'm just saying. It's more anonymous than maybe we think?

Teresa: Maybe.

Travis: Maybe?

Teresa: Alright. So, shortly after restaurant reviews became popular, it was possible that people would see the writers, right? And so when you have the chef, who might know who you are, you might get a different experience. That's what I'm talking about.

Travis: So you start... you start wearing costumes.

Teresa: Uh...

Travis: Showing up in disguise.

Teresa: I mean, maybe. But more like different names, probably.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: And so there is a reviewer, famously, today that is still anonymously reviewing. Marina O'Laughlin. um, who is from The Guardian. She does not allow photographs of her to be taken, and there's only one published photograph of her, with a white plate covering her face.

Travis: It's Abraham Lincoln.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: He's dead.

Travis: What?! Hold on! What happened! [laughs quietly]

Teresa: People don't live for... 200 years?

Travis: Oh, okay. So he died of old age. Okay. So let's keep going.

Teresa: Okay, okay. Next we have in the 1970s, Tim and Nina Zagat begin to compile restaurant ratings from diners who mostly at the beginning were just their friends, and then they published the very first Zagat Guide.

Travis: Zagat. Here's the thing. I think it was an SNL sketch. Maybe it was Chris Farley. Where he, like, read—"It's Zagats! I'm gonna read out of Zagats!" And he would, like, open the book and just, like, read the review in, like, "Oh, this is lovely. Oh, this got good re—"

And I just—I can't hear Zagat, just because of the way that it was said. "Oh, it's Zagats! Zagats!"

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: And I think about that all the time.

Teresa: I've never seen that.

Travis: I don't know that I've ever picked up a Zagats. There's this weird—I talk about it a lot in different things. I call it cultural osmosis, which I think other people, like, maybe have different names for it, or maybe I didn't invent that name.

But this thing of like, "I know exactly what that is." And someone's like, "Oh, so you've used it, or you've done it, or you've seen it." And I'm like, "Oh, absolutely not. But I know exactly what it is. I could tell you everything about it. I have never touched it in my life."

Teresa: Interest.

Travis: "Zagats!"

Teresa: Thanks, Chris Farley. Um, so getting to the heart of the matter. The first online reviews began to make an appearance in 1999. And those weren't even, like, reviews of brick and mortar stores. It was mostly, like we've talked about before, like, eBay. Right?

Um, and it was to—it was meant to help people kind of, like, suss out the legitimacy of who they were buying things from.

Travis: I think at this point—still, I mean, 25 years later, like, customer reviews is, like, the biggest metric, maybe most important metric when it comes to, like, e-shopping, right?

Because this idea, especially when you're dealing with, like, drop shippers and Amazon and stuff and you can't pick the thing up, and it's like, "Oh, this looks exactly like what I need."

And then it's like, it has 10,000 reviews and 1 star. And you're like, "Oh. This isn't what I need. I'm not getting this at all."

Teresa: I mean, I think that—also, a little tangent on that, uh, people paying for reviews, and reviews on one thing. Like, I have been shopping

before and looked at reviews to find that the reviews that are on the page for the item are not reviewing that item. They're for other items.

Travis: Well, and there's also—there's—

Teresa: To kind of pad out the reviews.

Travis: This is just a word of warning. I watch a lot of videos on YouTube about, like, scams and stuff, and there's also people who—I don't know which websites allow you to do this, right? But there are plenty of people on different places who will delete negative reviews.

Teresa: Hmm. That's unscrupulous.

Travis: Indeed. Um, so that way you look and you're like, "Oh, this must be a scam." And then you look and it's like, all these reviews are, like, four and five stars and talk about how great it is. And it's like, well, yeah. But they've deleted all the bad ones.

Teresa: So this is where it differs from the critic idea, right? Because now every person who can sign in, who has an email address or whatever, uh, can leave a review. They may not be talented in reviewing. They may not have any expertise. Um, the idea is you read these reviews kind of with a little bit of your—the sirens going off in your head. Like, "Hmm. What does this person really know? Are they talking about their personal experience? Is it more about 'When this shipped to me it was broken' instead of, like—"

Travis: Or, like, they ordered a size that was too small and that has nothing to do—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: I think it's why customer reviews online should be viewed as, like, an aggregate score, right? Like, for example, right? If I was looking for the best keyboard, right, to use with my computer, I might go on something like Wirecutter or look at, like, reviews of like, "Hey. We are experts in this thing. We put it through its tests, and this is what we determined to be the best

thing." Right? Okay, great. I'm gonna take that one source, you know, or whatever.

Versus I'm looking for, I don't know, a bookcase, right? And I'm scrolling through an online shop looking at bookcases, and I'm looking for things that have, you know, thousands of scores and looking at the aggregate number of like, oh, okay. Out of these thousands of reviews, the average out of 5 stars is, like, 4.9. That's really good.

There might be somebody in there who's like, "I ordered this bookcase and I don't like how it looks in my room. 1 star!"

Or whatever.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But the aggregate score is what I'm looking for.

Teresa: So you have this kind of, like, check and balance, right? You've got people who aren't maybe—maybe they aren't beholden to a company or institution, and so they have this really fresh kind of take on things. And then you have people who don't understand that they didn't like the bookcase, but the bookcase is doing the thing that it's supposed to be doing, and is as expected.

And so they give it 1 star because they don't like it. But, like, you have to... it is becoming kind of an art form of specifically online shopping to be able to sift through these kinds of things.

Travis: Yeah. And especially, uh—and I'm sure we're gonna talk more about etiquette after the break. But you gotta watch out, too. There are people who are like, "Oh. I own this business. And they're my rivals. So we're gonna send people to write negative reviews on their page, even though they've never been there."

This happened recently where—

Teresa: Another unscrupulous tactic.

Travis: Yeah. Where there was, like, um, this kerfuffle on the social medias about I believe it was, like, a fox tattoo. And people were like, "We're gonna, uh, metaphorically burn that place to the ground with Yelp reviews."

But they went to the wrong, like, tattoo parlor?

Teresa: Oh, man.

Travis: And they were like, filling it with bad reviews. And it was like, that wasn't even the place! Don't—whoa! And I am so excited to learn more. But first... how about a word from another Max Fun show?

[theme music plays]

[ticking]

Speaker 1: Back for another game?

Speaker 2: You know it.

Speaker 1: What's going on?

Speaker 2: Just one more week till MaxFunDrive.

Speaker 1: Hm! Hard to believe. It's been a heck of a year since the last one. We're now a worker-owned co-op. We raised \$50,000 for charity last year...

Speaker 2: And we've added a bunch of awesome new shows. But do you think we're ready to do it again?

Speaker 1: Absolutely. Lovely new gifts are lined up. The episodes will be amazing. And wait till everyone hears the bonus content!

Speaker 2: Yeah, plus they know to go to Maximumfun.org/newsletter, so they're getting all the news. Oh! Like that meetup day is on Thursday, March 21st.

Speaker 1: Then what's bothering you?

Speaker 2: Me? Oh, nothing. We're all set for MaxFunDrive to start on Monday, March 18th. I just didn't want you to see this coming. Check!

Speaker 1: What? Hang on!

[ticking and ad end]

[music plays]

Speaker 1: Most of the plants humans eat are technically grass.

Speaker 2: Most of the asphalt we drive on is almost a liquid.

Speaker 1: The formula of WD40 is San Diego's greatest secret.

Speaker 2: Zippers were invented by a Swedish immigrant love story.

Speaker 1: On the podcast Secretly Incredibly Fascinating, we explore this type of amazing stuff.

Speaker 2: Stuff about ordinary topics like cabbage and batteries and socks!

Speaker 1: Topics you'd never expect to be... the title of the podcast. Secretly Incredibly Fascinating.

Speaker 2: Find us by searching for the word "secretly" in your podcast app.

Speaker 1: And at Maximumfun.org.

[music and ad end]

Travis: Okay. Tell me more about reviews!

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So far, your telling me about it? Two thumbs up. Five stars.

Teresa: So we've got in 2001 The Yellow Pages and City Search added an online review feature to their own business directories.

Travis: Yellow Pages, for those of you—

Teresa: I know, I know.

Travis: —listening at home, they used to deliver books to people with very thin, cheap paper. And they would write these things called phone numbers on them. And you would call them, and sometimes someone would be there. It was very exciting.

Teresa: And then in 2004 Yelp came on the scene as, like, a one stop shop for small businesses reviews and opinions.

2007 brought us Goodreads for public book reviews, and then 2011 gave us Letterboxd for amateur movie critics to bask in. And so now, like, if you can talk about it, you can review it on the internet.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, and, you know, we've got lots of different ways to do, like, Google reviews, and then there's Glassdoor reviews, and, I mean, if you just... if you just look up "hilarious Glassdoor reviews," there's—

Travis: That's job applica—right? Of, like, employers and stuff?

Teresa: Yeah. There's a—Alexx's favorite is from an ex-Starbucks employee where the headline of the review is, "Working here is pooppy."

Travis: Oh boy!

Teresa: And their advice to management was to suck some eggs. [laughs]

Travis: Oh boy, okay.

Teresa: So this is what we're talking about, right?

Travis: There's professor reviews and stuff too, right? Of, like, you can see, like, what kind of teacher you're looking at for the next semester.

Teresa: Yep. There's Tripadvisor, which offers reviews of, like, travel destinations. Um, Facebook reviews we find are more for businesses, and Amazon allows you to review products. And then so, like, a 2019 survey by Shopper Approved said that a whopping 81% of consumers check Google reviews before trying out a new spot.

Travis: Yeah, I would say that's true. I mean, if I'm looking—especially, man, with kids, right? I need to know if the place is, like, conducive to bring children to. I need to look at what's on the menu. Are the kids gonna eat it? You know. Like, all kinds of stuff.

I would say that when we're looking for restaurants specifically, I do tend to look at the menu. I don't know if I rely so much on the reviews as I do, like, the pictures. I love looking at pictures.

Travis: Oh, the pictures are amazing.

Teresa: Of the restaurant. Because I can tell from the pictures if it's gonna be—like, is this place well-lit? Is this place, like, all high top tables or something, right? Or does it have nice, cozy booths we can push the children into? Things like that.

Travis: Well, I have found that—I think it's on Google. Like, Google Maps I use a lot to find restaurants. If you search "good for kids," it will pull up things based on what they find in the reviews as well of, "This is good for kids. This is not good for kids" or whatever.

And so you can find it by searching the, like, topic you're looking for. Like, "allows dogs" or whatever. And it will—even if it's just mentioned in people's reviews, it will pull up to, like, let you search through it.

Teresa: So. How to leave online reviews that are both thoughtful and helpful.

Travis: Um, first can I tell—Bebe does this thing, and it's really funny to me, where, like, she'll be eating dinner and she's like, "Hey. This dinner?"

And she'll hold, like, one thumb up, and then she'll go, "No, wait. Hold on. I've changed my mind. Two thumbs up." And, like, hold two.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I'm like, "Okay. Cool, man."

And it just feels like such a, like, reviewer thing. Like, I don't know if she's picked it up from a YouTube video or something. Like, one thumb—like, "Thumbs up. No, wait. I was wrong. Two thumbs up."

And it's like it's a reveal. Like it's a double switch—

Teresa: [simultaneously] [laughs] It's the timing for me.

Travis: —of like, "No. I changed my mind. Two thumbs up." And it's like, "Whoaaa! Thanks, man! Whoaaa!" Anyways, like and subscribe. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: [laughs] Um, so, first. I think that the first thing that one should consider is when should I write a review? When is it actually appropriate to write an online review for something?

Travis: This is good to talk about because for a long time—and I think it's gotten a lot better, but for a long time, like, the only reviews you would see on, like, Yelp were negative, right? Because when you have a good experience you're like, "That was nice," right? And you just walk away. And people most want to leave their thoughts when they have something to complain about.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: And it made it really hard sometimes to be like, "I don't know, man. This place is, like, really well reviewed. But here on this website it has, like, 2 stars."

And you look and it's like, yeah, there are three reviews and they're all very negative. And it's because it's like they had a singularly bad experience and wanted to talk about it. But I think it's gotten a lot better now. I think people have gotten used to, like, even if they don't leave a written review they do the stars or they do thumbs up or whatever it is.

Teresa: Right. And I think that what you really need to ask yourself is, is this review helpful?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, because—for a couple of reasons. First let's talk about kind of, like, genericism, right? Um, say that you're reviewing something on Amazon. If you're reviewing a toothbrush, you probably don't need to type up a dissertation on how much you love this toothbrush, because a toothbrush is usually just a toothbrush. There are—

Travis: Unless you can make it very funny. Or if it's a toothbrush that has special qualities, right?

Teresa: Right, no. I'm just talking about, like, a regular—regular toothbrush. They are pretty much all the same. And they pretty much tell you what you're gonna get. Are the bristles soft? Are the bristles hard? Does it have the little plastic thingies that might stab your gums, or does it not? That kind of thing, right?

Travis: I don't think they're supposed to stab your gums. Is that happening to you?

Teresa: Hmm, I think it is.

Travis: Oh, babe, you have to unwrap the toothbrush!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I would say, though, just to use this as an example, right? If it was something like, "Oh, this is activated charcoal and it has this and this and this technology, and it's gonna do this and this this."

And you buy it and you're like, it doesn't do any of that and it tastes, I don't know, like dirt, right? Then—

Teresa: Charcoal.

Travis: —that would be—

Teresa: Does taste like dirt. Does—it does taste like dirt.

Travis: It does. That would be an excellent thing to leave in a review for someone like me who's like, "But they say it's better, so I should buy it." And then you're like, "No, don't do that, Travis! It is not better!"

But on the other side, right? You have maybe, like, clothing, right? Which is really dependent on the sizing and the way that it's cut and, um, how different bodies are going to fit into it is different for every person, right? So reviews can be helpful. Where you talk about "This garment runs very small. It says that it's a large and I usually wear a large, but it fit me very tightly, so maybe size up." That kind of thing, right?

Travis: Well, and also, I mean, the reviews that I always really appreciate in stuff like that, because it is online I'm not picking it up. I'm not able to try it on. If you're like, "The fabric's really scratchy," right? Or like, "It's very thin," or "I wore it for a week and it started to fall apart," right?

That's very helpful when I can't physically pick it up and hold it, right? I want to look and see if it's, like, "Do not do this," right? Or, like, I buy a lot of aquarium equipment, right? And one of the things I look for is, like, "It's really loud," right? Or "It runs super quiet" or whatever, because that's one of the things I need and I can't know that until I've bought it.

Teresa: Exactly. Um, so we've got kind of, like, one side of the scale is, was it really bad? You're allowed to write a review. Was it really good? You're

allowed to write a review. Now, I also think that in the age of online shopping specifically, if an item is as expected, I believe that that is okay to write a review for, because so many times we see a picture of, say, a rug, right? That you want to buy.

And someone in the reviews writes, "This rug is 3x5 inches instead of 3x5 feet."

Travis: That's important to know.

Teresa: That's very important to know. It may not, you know—depending upon how legit the store is, right? That's selling this maybe on, like, Amazon or whatever, right? They may not actually say. And the pictures could be misleading. I think that it's an okay thing to write, "This was as expected."

Travis: Now, let me tell you what you don't need to write. And this—I did a bit on My Brother, My Brother, and Me for a while where I would read one star reviews for Justin and Griffin and they would have to guess what the product was. And my favorite ones I always came across were something like, "I bought this for my daughter and she didn't like it. 1 star."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And it's like, well, hold on, man. Like, I don't know if that is the pro—like, "This toy says it's great for all kids and my daughter—I got it for her and she was like, 'I don't wanna play with this.' So this product is bad." Like, now, hold on, man.

Teresa: Specifically speaking, though, you do want to keep your reviews as concise as possible, right? 'Cause you're not getting extra points for flowery—frow—flower... y... frow—

Travis: Flow—flowery.

Teresa: Yep. Language. Um, but you are getting points for getting to the point, right?

Um, and then make sure that your grammar and your spelling and your punctuation are correct. All of that aids in, like, understanding of your review, because if I can't read it, I can't understand it.

Travis: And you also don't need backstory. You don't need to be like, "I remember when I was a kid, and I went to the store, and this happened, and this happened. And now—"

You see that a lot in movie reviews. For some reason people will be like, "I remember seeing this in theaters and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

And it's like, cool, man. I just need to know if... [sighs] I just need to know if you liked the movie or not. Was it good? Even then. I don't—hey. I don't understand looking at movie reviews to decide if you want to watch a movie or not. Um, I'd rather watch the trailer and see if I'm interested. But that's just me. Right?

Teresa: Well, sure.

Travis: Unless you're like, "Hey. Um, this movie? Um, ten minutes in it just goes to a black screen and remains a black screen for an hour and 20 minutes, and that's all there is."

I would like to know that before I go see the movie. Otherwise, I'll probably just try it out.

Teresa: That would be strange.

Travis: That's what I'm saying.

Teresa: Okay. Alright.

Travis: "This movie falls apart in a week," or whatever. I guess I would need to know that.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "This movie's made of really scratchy material."

Teresa: Um, next, you need to be very choosy whether or not you name someone in your review. Like, for restaurants specifically. If you are writing a good review, it might be really helpful to shout out your server, or someone who gave you great customer service.

Not only is that kind of, like, really awesome to read, that people enjoy being taken care of that way, but also some restaurants run little contests for servers or, you know, they might get—

Travis: [crosstalk] retail stuff where, like, there's a link at the bottom or something. There's a code at the bottom to review this person, and if you give me 10 stars or whatever. Like, that is... like, I've worked a lot of retail jobs and that's something that they pay attention to.

Teresa: But if someone wasn't particularly helpful, I would caution against naming that particular person in the review. Because if you are that unsatisfied with a specific person, I would recommend reaching out to the owner instead.

Um, because they are the people who can actually rectify this situation. You writing an online review saying how somebody ignored you at a restaurant and their name was blah-blah-blah, then that doesn't make anything better. It just makes life worse for that particular person.

Travis: I would also say that... [sighs] and I'm sure we've talked about this before, but you do not know what factors have gone into that person's day that has brought them to this point, and I would argue most of the things that you would complain about a specific server on, like at a restaurant, is like, maybe a factor that's completely outside of their control, like maybe the restaurant was understaffed and they had way too many tables, or like the kitchen was way behind and it took longer to get your food out. Or, like, the food being made wrong is rarely a server's fault unless they entered it wrong.

So I would say that somebody going above and beyond, right? Is them being an exemplary employee. There being issues with, like, wait times, you know, food being wrong or cold or whatever is more of an indication that there is

something going wrong at the restaurant as a whole more than it's just like, "Man. This one person made everything wrong," or whatever. Like, I think it's more of an indication that there's something that needs to be fixed about the processes.

Teresa: And I think that that is okay to write in your review. It is okay to write that their sectioning for the tables is poor, so their servers are overwhelmed. Or their kitchen is badly run, so the food comes out cold. Or things like that, right? I think that is very helpful for someone. Whereas calling out a person specifically saying it was all their fault, probably not very helpful.

Um, and I think that if you are writing online reviews, you need to be open to responses. In 2009, Yelp added the ability for businesses to reply to reviews, so it becomes more of a dialogue, right? And so it's possible you might get a comment back on your review from a manager who wants to make things right. And I think that that's something that you really should try and be open to. I'm not saying that you can't express your frustrations, but be open to the possibility that the company really wants to try and make things better for you.

Um, and if you're a business owner, I think that that's a great tool for you, to be ready to give those responses—in a kind and respectful manner, of course. Not everyone is going to love everything that they do, and that's okay. Maybe that's not the demographic, maybe, that you're aiming before. Like, we've talked about the kid stuff.

If you say that your restaurant is great for kids, and then somebody with kids has a poor experience because you don't have a kids menu, right? They might write that. And then—

Travis: Hey, listen. If you're a restaurant owner, have a kids menu! Get some boxes of Kraft mac and cheese in there. Get some frozen maca—get some frozen chicken nuggets. Like, it ain't hard.

And listen. Hey, listen. If you're listening and you own a restaurant and you have a kids menu and you have macaroni and cheese on there and it isn't Kraft macaroni and cheese—

Teresa: This has become, like, a personal vendetta for you. [laughs]

Travis: I know, but listen. Any chance—any chance I get... what are you doing? 'Cause I say to my kid, "There's ma—there's macaroni and cheese on there." And they're like, "Yeah!" And then it comes and there's, like, some bread crumbs, and it's bruleed, and it's got all kinds of stuff in it. And my daughter, like, "No! What is this? This isn't—no."

Just make it Kraft macaroni and cheese. I'm over the moon if it's Kraft macaroni and cheese! Are you kidding me? You can bring me out one of those little microwavable cups of Kraft macaroni and cheese and I'll be so happy, 'cause my kid will eat it while I'm eating food that I didn't have to make. It's amazing! Stop overdoing the kids macaroni and cheese. Who are you trying to impress? My four-year-old?! Come on!

Sorry, I'm done now. It's just...

Teresa: You're—you're done?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Okay. Alright. So... in summation. It is—

Travis: Kraft macaroni and cheese.

Teresa: No. No, no, no, no, no.

Travis: [simultaneously] It's a home run every time.

Teresa: No, no, no, no.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: We're done with macaroni and cheese. You said you were done.

Travis: Same with grilled cheese by the way. Cheese—

Teresa: Oh my god!

Travis: Cheese, bread. Don't put other stuff on there, they're children. Okay, go on.

Teresa: Okay. So. In summation... please be effusive with your 5-star reviews. Everybody loves them. They're great.

Also, don't be afraid if you have any kind of, like, anxiety to express your frustrations, right? But there are a few things I would recommend first. Reach out to the company first. Uh, sometimes if you send them directly to them instead of posting it online, they'll be eager to make things better for you to avoid the negative review.

Travis: Especially if it's something—if it's like, this was broken, right? Like, cool, we can replace that. That's not an inherent problem with the company.

I mean, if you're like, "This was packed badly," or whatever. But so often that might be a deal with the delivery. It might be—I don't—who knows, right?

Teresa: But most people are willing to make it right, especially small businesses, right? Also, have a reasonable amount of empathy. You never know what that person is going through. And, you know, we've talked about that. We've also talked about thinking before you post. Are you angry about this situation? Maybe having a cooling off period will help give you a little more, um, you know, insight on the matter. Sleep on it. Talk it out with your friends. Maybe—try not to rely too much on this perceived anonymity, right?

Travis: Yeah. I would also say, along with a certain amount of empathy, have a reasonable expectation of the process, even before you get there, right? Or some kind of gauge.

Because there would be a big difference between, like, oh, I'm going to this, like, chain salon, right? Where there's 18 people working all the time. To this, um, like, independently-owned small business salon where there's maybe two people, and I might have to wait a little bit longer because it's only two people, but the servi—whatever. Right?

And so those are different experiences. And if you go into it expecting one or the other, you're gonna be disappointed, and your review is gonna reflect that.

Teresa: Yes. I would also say... don't feel guilty. If you are an anxious type of person, and I sometimes am, don't feel guilty about reporting something like racism or homophobia or blatant sexism or anything like that. Because if you felt, like, creeped out or upset by a place, writing a review is a good way to make sure that other people avoid that experience. So I think that is okay.

Travis: I agree. Um, thank you so much for listening. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not make this show. And thank you to you for listening. You're great! Five stars, one thumb up. No, wait. Two thumbs up.

Teresa: [simultaneously] Two thumbs up.

Travis: Um, go to mcelroymerch.com. Check out all the cool merch that's there for your purchase. All 5-star stuff. All amazing stuff. And let's see. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, 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. As always, we are currently taking topic submissions, and questions, and idioms, always. Please submit those to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every one.

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

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners...

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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