

Shmanners 433: Ask Shmanners: Holiday Edition

Published November 8th, 2024

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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: Meh, yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Cool. You could always lie.

Teresa: [laughs] But why lie? The people deserve to know the truth.

Travis: Do they?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: They haven't earned— Have you earned that? Hey, really think about it.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I want you guys to really do some introspection, look deep into your hearts. Have you earned the truth about how Teresa's doing today? Some of you have.

Teresa: I don't think that you truly understand...

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: What kind of chaos ensues with Daylight Savings Time.

Travis: Oh my god.

Teresa: Until you have young children. And you know what? Our children really aren't that young anymore, and yet.

Travis: Young at— They're young at heart.

Teresa: And yet the chaos continues.

Travis: I think that there's always a breakdown the moment that they're like, "But why did we do that?" and the answer's like, "Aw man."

Teresa: "I don't know."

Travis: "Man yeah."

Teresa: "I don't know."

Travis: "It's wild, huh. We decided we wanted it to be light in the morning and dark at— I don't know."

Teresa: Now—

Travis: "We decided that we wanted to have time— control over time itself, like Kronos."

Teresa: So there is something to be said about it is only slightly easier for the fall back, okay, because you are gaining an hour.

Travis: Are you sitting here defending Daylight Savings Time?

Teresa: Instead of the spring forward, where you effectively lose probably six hours of your life.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: [chuckles] I think is what it feels like.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Whereas just with the one hour, the fall back, you only lose one hour of your life. Because the children, they still get up at the same time, like it's not that time.

Travis: And they get tired at the same time.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Anyways, that's not at all what we're talking about today.

Teresa: No, we're not.

Travis: We're gonna talk about a whole bunch of stuff, because we've got ourselves—

Teresa: Oh wait.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: How are you, Travis?

Travis: Thank you for asking. I'm great!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: No, it— You know, lot of travel. Lot of travel and, you know, it's exciting travel though, it's fun. Going to London and doing tours and everything. We're recording this way earlier than normal Monday, about to go out for Indianapolis and Milwaukee, then at the end of the month I've got *Twenty-Sided Tavern* in my Off-Broadway debut. And—

Teresa: [chuckles] Debutt.

Travis: The butt.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I'm very excited about that. But I'm really looking forward to the holidays.

Teresa: Can we say that on *Shmanners*?

Travis: Debutt? Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. [laughs]

Travis: I think we can. But I'm really looking forward to the holidays.

Teresa: The ching ching ching ching ching ching ching.

Travis: Is that the bell?

Teresa: Yeah. That's the—

Travis: Like sleigh bells?

Teresa: Those are the bells.

Travis: Which bells? The Thanksgiving bells?

Teresa: [chuckles] No, the sleigh bells. I skipped Thanksgiving. [giggles]

Travis: Aw man.

Teresa: Sorry.

Travis: Not again.

Teresa: [laughs] Sorry. I got that—

Travis: No, but this is interesting, because—

Teresa: I got the Christmas creep in my brain.

Travis: — long time listeners will know I love prepping for Thanksgiving, I make— I cook a lot for Thanksgiving, but we're gonna be in New York for it, so we're like going out to eat at a restaurant.

And I find every year Thanksgiving to be the most I relate to Bob Belcher, and being like, "That's me, I'm doing it." And now we're going to a restaurant I'm like, "Feels wrong." It feels wrong, I won't dirty the whole house and use every dish? Oh no.

Teresa: Your life has gone topsy turvy.

Travis: It is. Turvy topsy, even.

Teresa: Mm, yes. So today we are talking about—

Travis: What's the opposite of top— If you're like, "Actually my life is bottomsy swervy," right?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Like that means everything's going normally.

Teresa: Straight and narrow.

Travis: Oh my god. You've blown this whole thing wide open.

Teresa: I don't think so.

Travis: Debutt.

Teresa: [chuckles] Okay.

Travis: Okay, so.

Teresa: We are doing an Ask *Shmanners*: Holiday Edition.

Travis: Let's do it.

Teresa: As the holidays, they do be coming.

Travis: Just hear those sleighbells ringlin', ting ting tinglin' too.

Teresa: Here's our first question. We have a handful of people writing about this type of question, so this is an amalgam of several of the same type.

Travis: And they ask "What is love? What am love?"

Teresa: No.

Travis: "Am robot love?"

Teresa: "I have a family member who is a biiiiiit obsessed with my love life, who I'm dating, why I'm not in a relationship, if I'm even trying to date, on and on and on.

I know that they're just curious about my life and want me to be happy, but the answers to these questions are complicated and nuanced, and deeply personal. I don't wanna get into that with Grandma or Aunt Becky or Uncle Ted or my random third cousin twice removed.

How do I shut down or deter these questions, without making my loved one feel like I don't want to talk to them. I do, just not about my love life."

Travis: You know I think, especially when it's a relative that you don't see all that often.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? Or that you don't have a like close, you know, kind of friendly relationship with, we want to talk to each other about things and have conversations about things, but like they don't know like what your hobbies are, what you've been into lately, what kind of— You know, they might not have—

Teresa: These are kind of formulaic questions—

Travis: Right.

Teresa: — that people start with.

Travis: So they might not have the shared interests that you would have like hanging out with a friend, right? Where you can be like, "Oh my god, have you watched the latest episode of blah blah blah," right?

And so I think that... short of saying like, "Hey listen, I'm not really— Like listen, it's a big mess right now that I don't know, or like it's— I'm trying to figure out my own love life, let alone answer you," right? A deflection would be to, one, ask them questions.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: And two, shift the conversation to something you do wanna talk about.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because if they're asking this, they're showing an interest in you and they want to get to know you, and they're doing it in something that like, "I know everybody has some form of relationship with another human being in some way, so this is probably something that will start a conversation," or whatever, right.

Teresa: And I think, for on the opposite side of the coin from this, is if you can come up with a few other questions that you might want to ask your relations.

Travis: "How's your love life, Grandma?"

Teresa: No, no.

Travis: Oh. "Who are you dating?"

Teresa: Then you might be more prepared, right? One of the things that I love asking, because— Okay, background here. I used to meet lots of young people as I was doing my swim lessons.

Travis: Yeah. And you worked in children's theatre a lot.

Teresa: And children's theatre.

Travis: As a grown-up in children's theatre.

Teresa: And there were so many things that you didn't want to ask them, like, "Where did you get your pretty dress?" or whatever, like silly things like that.

Travis: Especially when you're swimming. What are they doing in that pretty dress? Rescue that child.

Teresa: You would say— I would like to say, "Have you read any good books lately?" That is one of the things that I like, and children, they get read to a lot, so they actually do get a lot of exposure to books. You would be so surprised how many times I ended up with actually like [chuckles] good answers from five-year-olds.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: About the books that they've read or been read to.

Travis: Or video games, or movies, or TV shows, or what have you.

Teresa: Sure, sure. And I think that that's a really great one to ask anyone of any age, any gender. "You read any good books lately?"

Travis: I also think that you can— to be like proactive about it, if you get asked about your relationship, something like, "You know, that really hasn't been my focus right now. I've been finding things that make me happy. Something I've really been enjoying lately," and then start talking about that.

Teresa: Mm. That's great.

Travis: Right, so that way you have— you're not shutting down the conversation, but you're like shifting gears to something you do wanna talk about.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And if they keep coming back to that, I think at a certain point there's only so much polite deflection you can do.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Before you're like, "Yeah, you know what? That's— Like that area of my life right now isn't like a thing that I even know how to answer those questions, and so like it's making me feel kinda awkward to talk about it. But I would love to talk to you about such and such and such and such," you know what I mean?

Teresa: So Jessica Goodman wrote an article in Bumble about some very specific ways to get out of this question. Obviously, the direct approach is "Uh, no I'd rather not say. I don't wanna talk about it. But how about you?" right. That's the important part, right?

Travis: To that point—

Teresa: You want to change the subject pretty quickly, so your feelings are made clear.

Travis: And to that point, I think it's important that you don't do a funny deflection.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of like, "Oh, no comment" or like, "I plead the—," or like— Right? Because—

Teresa: Because that feels like a polite decline that means...

Travis: Ask me again.

Teresa: Ask me again.

Travis: Or "I'm hiding some— Oh, there's something juicy here that I'm not telling you." Whereas like a statement of "Yeah, that's not really something I wanna talk about."

Teresa: Yeah, and she also suggests to try and consider their motive. Are they just trying to make conversation, and so any conversation will do? Or are they looking for an actual answer, right?

Travis: And that's the other thing too is like to read a little motivation behind it, and I don't know everybody's individual grandma. I know a lot of grandmas, but not everybody's.

Teresa: Mm, yeah.

Travis: And you have to remember the generational difference of, for a long time, like the idea of happiness equals like settled down, married.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: You have a life going, and so what they really probably want to talk to you about is like, "Are you doing okay? Are you happy? Is everything okay with you?" right. They wanna check in with that.

And in their mind, like steady job, own a house, married. You know, these are the things of like, "This is what happiness is," right. And so that's the form that they have so they don't worry about you.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And if that's the case, then what they really wanna hear about is the things that make you happy and are you doing okay, and all that stuff.

Teresa: Right. And finally, therapist Amy Hartstein was interviewed for Jessica's article, and she said that with your extended family, or not close friends, your first job is to protect yourself. So we are giving you, and this therapist is also giving you, permission to fudge the details, or say that you aren't seeing anyone, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: They don't need to know.

Travis: Except dead people.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And now it's a completely different conversation.

Teresa: They don't need to know things about you that you don't want them to know, right?

Travis: Yip.

Teresa: And if you just don't want to— If you want to shut that conversation down, the answer is, "Nope, not seein' anyone."

Travis: Yip. "But what I am seeing is the latest Marvel movie."

Teresa: Ha ha.

Travis: "And I'd like to tell you in depth about Thanos and his evil plan, Grandma."

Teresa: [laughs] Sure, I'm sure she'd love that.

Travis: Next question.

Teresa: "I'm a pretty picky eater. Have—"

Travis: And I'm a pretty princess. [chuckles]

Teresa: [chuckles] Shhh, shush shush shush shush.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: "And [chuckles] I have a couple of food sensitivities. This means at a potluck, my plate usually looks pretty sparse. I don't mind, I eat what I like, but inevitably some relative will go 'That's a tiny plate' or 'Why aren't you eating, sweetie?'. I don't want to explain my digestive issues to my Great Aunt Martha. What can I say?"

Travis: So in this circumstance, I think a funny quip or deflection can work, of like, "I don't want to fill up all at once," or like you know "I'm keeping my options open."

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: "This is my exploratory plate, right, before I go back for the main course," or like whatever, right. If you don't wanna get into it, I think

something like, "Yeah, you know what? This is just my walkin' around plate."

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: "I haven't settled on which one I want," or whatever.

Teresa: "Life is short, eat dessert first."

Travis: Yeah, right.

Teresa: Something like that.

Travis: Or if you just said like, "I had a big lunch."

Teresa: Yeah. I think that those are some great ideas. I mean, again, I think it's important to try and figure out like what's their motive. If this is like polite conversation or if someone might actually be fearful of like that you're not getting enough nutrition, right? In any case, it's really not appropriate to comment on how much or what people are eating, right?

Travis: Yip.

Teresa: And I think that you can always say that. After you do your "Oh well, I'm just pickin' and choosin'," or whatever it is, if people won't leave you alone, I think it's okay to say like, "I'm actually not that comfortable about you like commenting on my food. I'm taking care of myself, and I'd appreciate if you did the same."

Travis: And I think it's important there— Listen, I'm no expert on therapy or setting boundaries or anything like that, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But I do— I'm of the opinion that setting a boundary, as much as you can, keep defensiveness out of it.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right, because the boundary is for you, not a reflection of the thing they've said to you. So saying, "I am not comfortable like, talking

about my eating habits or whatever, that's mine." Right, versus, "It's not okay for you to ask me about this."

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Right, because—

Teresa: That's great.

Travis: Because sometimes when you're in situations like this, especially like, you know, some people have, you know, different relationships with their family, different relationships with different people in their family.

And the anxiety of, "I know if I say something, it might turn into a thing, I'm going to hear about it forever."

Whereas if you just say like, "Yeah, you know what? My eating habits are mine, and like the food I wanna eat. This is what I'm comfortable, and I'm not really comfortable— It makes me feel weird to talk about my eating habits with you," right? Or "It makes me feel weird, like I start to overthink what I'm do—" Whatever, it's about you.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And your comfort level. And if they're like, "Well, I was just asking," say like, "I understand that, but it's just not something I'm comfortable with," right.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like—

Teresa: And.

Travis: "Like, I wouldn't ask you about going to the bathroom." Now don't say that.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But you can have that in your head as a justification for whatever you're saying.

Teresa: Yeah, and like I think that a lot of the times at these family like get togethers, people's hearts are in the right place. They don't wanna see anybody go hungry, right? That's why we put out so much food. But like—

Travis: And often time to that degree, seeing someone like have a little bit of food or whatever can sometimes translate in someone's brain to, "They're nervous."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Or like, "They're too shy to go get a big plate," or whatever. Right, they will lead it— Especially like, you know, I grew up with my mom and her mom and everybody like old Southern lady host kinda vibe. Of like, "I've made so much food because food is a love language, and I want everybody to taste the love that I've poured into everything," right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: So it can also be excitement of like, "We made all this food and it's so good and so yummy, you have to try it." Right. And if you're like, "Listen, I'm eating as much as I want to," right. It's not always coming from a place of judgment or shame.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But man that's how it comes out.

Teresa: Yeah, that's hard. And I mean if you trust the person, and you want to have a conversation about your likes and dislikes, or your medical problems or whatever it be, right. I think that's an okay way to explain why you are eating the things that you're eating. If that's the conversation you want to have.

Travis: Another one too, and it depends on your age, 'cause you can't really get away with this is you're like 14. But me now at 40, if I just deploy like, "You know, as I get older, I have to think more and more about my eating habits." And it's like so that I know that like if I do this or this or this, I'm gonna end up with heartburn or whatever it is, right?

Teresa: Mm, yeah.

Travis: Because if there's one thing old people like—

Teresa: Understand. [chuckles]

Travis: It's heartburn.

Teresa: It's heartburn. [laughs]

Travis: Heartburn is a great get out of that conversation.

Teresa: Another one.

Travis: Well before we do! How about a word from another MaxFun show?

[theme music fades in]

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Man, I really stumbled through that one. AnotherMaxFunshow.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Kirk: Say you like video games, and who doesn't?

Maddy: I mean some people probably don't.

Kirk: Okay, but a lot of people do. So say you're one of those people, and you don't really have anyone to talk to about the games that you like.

Jason: Well, you should get some better friends.

Maddy: [chuckles]

Kirk: Oh, yes, you could get some better friends, but you could also listen to *Triple Click*.

[triple drum hit plays]

Kirk: A weekly podcast about video games, hosted by me, Kirk Hamilton.

Maddy: Me, Maddy Myers.

Jason: And me, Jason Schreier. We talk about new releases, old classics, industry news, and whatever really.

Maddy: We'll show you new things to love about games, and maybe even help you find new friends to talk to about them.

Kirk: *Triple Click.*

[triple drum hit plays]

Kirk: It's kinda like we're your friends. Find us at maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[ukulele music plays]

Jesse: Hi, I'm Jesse Thorn, the founder of MaximumFun, and I have a special announcement. I'm no longer embarrassed by *My Brother, My Brother And Me*.

You know for years, each new episode of this supposed advice show was a fresh insight, a depraved jumble of erection jokes, ghost humor, and frankly this is for the best, very little actionable advice. But now as they enter their twilight years, I'm as surprised as anyone to admit that it's gotten kinda good.

Justin, Travis, and Griffin's witticisms are more refined, like a humor column in a fancy magazine, and they hardly ever say, "Bazinga" anymore.

So, after you've completely finished listening to every single one of all of our other shows, why not join the McElroy brothers every week for *My Brother, My Brother And Me*.

[ukulele music fades out]

Travis: Okay, now how about another one.

Teresa: Now we're ready.

Travis: Yes. Give me the gift of another question.

Teresa: Indeed. "Both of my uncles, historically, do not get along very well. Like outbursts at Thanksgiving dinner that leave them screaming at each other in the driveway don't get along very well."

Travis: It's an Uncle Rumble.

Teresa: "I—" [chuckles] That's nice. "I love them both, but this type of behavior is unacceptable." I agree. "My grandmother still insists on inviting them both every single year. How can we handle this and keep everyone happy, or at least their volume to a minimum?"

Travis: Ya know.

Teresa: That really sucks. I hate that.

Travis: That does suck, and it's always rough when there are people in your life, especially people who are not, it sounds like, optional in your life.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Who repeatedly cross a boundary or cross a line or create a scene, and don't have the self-awareness to be like, "Oh, I didn't feel good about how that went. There are things I need to do differently," right? That they're like, "It's the other person's fault" every time, that's very hard because it often feels like there's nothing— If—

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: If they haven't gotten it at this point, there's nothing I can say. That said, I encourage everybody, as we talk about boundaries, which a lot of this is going to come back to, setting the expectation before anything happens.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Of like, "Hey guys, this year, we're gonna keep that fighting down. Like If we start to touch on a topic or whatever, let's come up with

a codeword or whatever. 'Cause it doesn't feel good for us, I know it can't feel good for you. And if you guys wanna talk about this tomorrow, and have it out just one on one, do it."

Right, we've had it before where we've had family gatherings and said like, "And we're not talking anything about politics today."

Teresa: Yup.

Travis: Right? And then if that's established early, any time you start to veer towards that, like, "No, we talked about this," right. And if they had agreed to it ear— Like it's not gonna make it like perfect, they— there will probably still be moments.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But you have like some kind of signpost to point to of like, "Nope," right. And it saves you from having to one, fully address it in the moment and bring it up when things are getting heated.

Teresa: Yeah, I love this idea of setting expectations, right.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Like the things— And I think that that is something that it can't just be the two sides of the arguments, right. It's gotta be everyone in the family understands the expectations.

I think that in this situation, it might be the person who invites both of the people to their home, right. Grandma needs to say, "You guys cannot fight, because if you do, you will be asked to leave," or something like that, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Also, here's some actionable things that you can do. This might be a great opportunity to have place cards. Seat people away from each other. [chuckles]

Travis: Well and here's the other thing too. When we talk about like boundaries and stuff.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I think that it can be tricky sometimes because a boundary for you might be so obvious, right. And a behavior's so obvious to you, but like for example, there are things—

Not so much anymore, we're too old for that now, but like Justin and Griffin and I used to like, not argue about something, but like get into a, "No that's not it, it's this and this and this," right? And like get heated, and some— You know, I have a bunch of friends where it's like, "I like to have passionate debates," about like a movie or whatever, right?

Teresa: Right. Right.

Travis: And to me, that's perfectly normal, and— But for other people sitting outside, it's like, "You guys are getting louder and louder, and it kinda seems like you're yelling at each other. And this is making me really uncomfortable." But to me.

Teresa: Yeah, maybe— We— There is somebody who understands they're having fun, and there are other people who don't understand and they are uncomfortable with like the physical attributes happening.

Travis: So setting a boundary isn't just good for you, it also makes a clear mark of like, "Hey, in case you guys have ever wondered where the line is where it starts to get uncomfortable for other people, because that doesn't register for you obviously, this is where it is."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "And we can point to it when you guys step over it, and be like 'Hey, we said no fighting'," and that might be enough for them to be like, "I didn't realize we were fighting."

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: "I— Like we were at the beginning of the escalation, and clearly up here we're fighting, but it's too late by that point 'cause we're all the way up here."

But if you can point it out down here at the beginning of the ramp, they'll maybe see it differently. But if you set that boundary and they can't stick to that boundary, you gave them the chance, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And then you also can say to your grandma "Grandma, like I know you wanna have 'em both there, but we talked to them about this thing and they still did it."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "So something has to change."

Teresa: Yeah. Another actionable thing is if you find that any of this discourse is alcohol-fueled, you might want to— I mean even something as simple as "We don't pout anybody wine until after dinner."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? I mean you don't have to exclude it completely from the gathering if that's something that you wanna do, but if you change the way that people imbibe, maybe that will be enough.

Travis: And also listen, this is half joke, but you could gamify it.

Teresa: You could.

Travis: You could say to 'em like, "Hey, there's a bet going this year. Right, a contest, and the first person to start an argument loses and has to do blank for the other person," right.

Teresa: Ooo.

Travis: And so like—

Teresa: Kitchen duty.

Travis: Right, something.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Like whoever starts the argument, right, has to clean up after dinner. Something that now if they have, it sounds like, two competitive brothers or whatever. Okay cool, make it a competition to be less volatile, to be less, you know, who can be most polite or whatever.

Teresa: I like it.

Travis: And set a new standard.

Teresa: Alright. Here's the last one. "My sister declared no presents this year. We loved doing Secret Santa in the past few years, and I don't know why she's being like this.

I totally understand if it's a money thing, but I love giving gifts too. Can I still bring gifts even if she doesn't want to?" Now this is something that we have had to discuss amongst our family as well.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Because gift giving is a love language, people love to give gifts. And yet there are other people who become overwhelmed.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: With the amount of gifts, or even with the idea of "This person is going to get me more than I can give," right? And so again, you have to talk about it. I know it's uncomfortable.

Travis: Well it's right there in the question.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: 'Cause you said, "I don't know why she's being like this."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And this is a thing I often can be too— Not logic, I'm not like Spock or nothing. But like much like Bebe does, I want to understand the motivation behind the thing.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: Because sometimes when there's a big blanket statement, right, it's like, "Okay but let's actually address what the concern is, 'cause maybe we can find a way that is beneficial to everybody, and still meets that thing."

Teresa: And I think that the way that you have to do it is you are only allowed to go in asking for clarification.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Not trying to change their mind. If they change their mind through the discussion, that's different. But if you go in thinking "I'm gonna convince her that we should give gifts," right.

Travis: And also not—

Teresa: That is gonna be a fight.

Travis: Not negotiating, right.

Teresa: Not negotiating.

Travis: "Well, okay. Was it okay if I do this? Well what if we do this?"

Teresa: Right.

Travis: "Is this okay?" Right, because that's just going to make them feel defensive and like they have to justify themselves.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But like what is it about presents? I mean, because for some people, as you said, like I love finding like the perfect re— What's the thing that this person definitely wants and needs but would never think of getting for themselves, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And so like that to me is like the hunt, you know I love doing that. And I know that that's not the case.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: For everybody. So at this point in your family, some people like lists, we do lists for them. Some people are like, "We're gonna get one gift for each grown up, and then like two or three for each kid, 'cause they're— our family's getting bigger and bigger it seems every year."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And it's like, "Okay cool, great, that's what works for you. My way of doing it would be this. Does that work for you?" 'Cause another thing too, if your sister has kids, it might just be that they have a bunch of crap at their house.

Teresa: Right yeah, so here's the thing, right. So here's a couple of questions you can ask. When she says, "giftless," does she mean absolutely no presents at all for anyone, or just not the adults? Maybe she's still okay with gifts for the kids. Would she be comfortable if you still brought a useful or sustainable gift that could be like an eatable gift.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And eat— edible. [chuckles]

Travis: Or an experience?

Teresa: An experience, like a zoo membership or something.

Travis: Or like a gift certificate to go out to dinner or something, you know.

Teresa: Right. Or what about a homemade card exchange? Something that you can make that shows that— the other person that you're thinking of them, right?

And so there are lots of different ways that you can respect her wishes of no gifts this year, but she also needs to respect that you don't have that agreement with everyone else.

Travis: Yeah, I'll also— I'll flip this around, and sister if you're listening, you can't unilaterally declare no gifts this year.

Teresa: You can say, "Please don't give me any gifts this year."

Travis: Right.

Teresa: "I will not be giving anyone else gifts this year."

Travis: Right, you can dictate your own pattern of behavior, but like the idea of— Because here's the thing.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: As wonderful as it is to receive a gift, part of the beauty of like gift-giving is that moment of "I'm giving this thing, I thought of it when I saw you." And like I for example don't really care about getting stuff back. I mean I like stuff.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Stuff is great. But I like getting people things, and like— Because it's a way for me to be like, "I was thinking of you, I saw this, I knew you'd like it, immediately clicked for me, I had to get it for you."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And there's like no expectation of reciprocation there. And especially if it's like, you know, if you're adults or whatever. One of the things, as I get older, and especially before we had kids, feeling more and more distanced from like holiday traditions.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: And family traditions.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: And so just like removing that aspect of like, "Hey, this thing that we've done every year, you know, we did a White Elephant, we did a

Secret Santa or whatever. We're not doing that anymore." I— You can't really just unilaterally say, "Hey, this tradition that our family has done for years and years and years, nope!"

Teresa: The only thing that you can control is yourself, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So if you don't wanna give gifts or receive gifts, you can say that. But this sister cannot stop the other people in her family from giving gifts to each other.

Now, I think that it would be really nice if maybe at the family thing, we don't exchange gifts, if that's what she wants. Set up another time for her— I'm using so many pronouns, I don't understand. You can—

Travis: Person A. Person B.

Teresa: [laughs] Person B can give presents to Mom if they want to.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: They don't have to do it at the— Christmas morning, when person A is there, right?

Travis: Yeah, you could also say like, "Hey, we're gonna do gifts from like nine to 10, and then we're gonna do like a brunch from 11 on. Come for brunch."

Teresa: Exactly. But to just say, "We are not doing presents this year" is not something for— that you can really dictate.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Money is tight, I get that.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Maybe you guys wanna work out something where you set like a monetary value for each person.

Travis: Or you say, like, “We’re only giving gifts that we already own that I know that you love,” right?

Teresa: Oh, that’s a great idea.

Travis: Like this— “I know you’ve always—” Like for example, I have too many plants in my house right now, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I would love to give some of my houseplants to people as gifts, right. Or something right, where it’s like homemade or it’s some—

Like zero dollars, “The rule this year, everything costs zero dollars. So it’s something you made, something you already had, something that doesn’t cost any money to give,” right. Like, “You’ve been asking me to watch this TV show so you could talk about it with me. I’m gonna do that for you.”

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right, something like that, where it still— You don’t have to spend money to show the person that you were thinking about them and knew that they loved you, you know. It’s a trope in TV shows, but like coupon books of like a thing of like, “Hey, I know I never wanna hear you talk about how much you hated this time travel movie, Travis.”

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: But you can—

Teresa: Loo— [coughs] *Looper*.

Travis: It’s not important. And—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I actually need to give it another chance, it’s been too long.

Teresa: No, please don’t.

Travis: Anyway, "You can cash in this coupon and I have to listen to you complain about this movie for 30 minutes," right?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And so it might also just be that at this point, maybe the... And once again this is hypothetical, I don't know Question Asker's family, but there has been like an escalating, almost competitive feeling of...

Teresa: Mmm.

Travis: "Oh, I'm gonna outdo you with how thoughtful I was this year," or whatever. And it— That can be very stressful, right? Especially if you're someone who just wants to give a gift that they'll like, and isn't like earth-shatteringly brilliant.

And you're like, "I don't feel like my gift is as appreciated or good enough or whatever." There's a lot of different very understandable, justifiable reasons that you're like, "The idea of gift exchange overwhelms me."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But if that's the case, you need to talk with your people about it. That's gonna do it for us. I love, by the way, doing *Ask Shmanners*, and especially like familial holiday or anything really.

Teresa: Oh yeah.

Travis: So if you have questions, please email them to us, shmannerstcast@gmail.com. And maybe we'll do another one before the holidays, we have a little bit of time.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I mentioned it earlier, but I'm gonna be at *Twenty-Sided Tavern*, on my Off-Broadway debut, doing a really wonderful— It's a *D&D* live stage experience.

Teresa: Improv-ish.

Travis: Improv-ish. It's in the way that like *Adventure Zone* is made up on the spot.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I don't necessarily think of it as improv, but I suppose it is. But I will be playing several different Trickster roles, depending on which one the audience chooses, it's very audience interactive, there's a games for the audience to do.

Teresa: And it changes every night.

Travis: Yup, that will impact the way that it goes. It's a wonderful show, high tech, wonder— High tech. I feel like a old person.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "They've got screens and everything!"

Teresa: "And lights!" [chuckles]

Travis: Find out, we're gonna be there, I'm gonna be doing it the week of Thanksgiving, I believe the 27th through December 1st. Go get your tickets, find out all about the show at thetwentsidedtavern.com, all spelled out. And I'm excited to see you there.

We want to say thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to your for listening. We couldn't have made this show without you, 'cause you sent questions in for this episode.

Teresa: That's right. Absolutely couldn't have.

Travis: And it could have been like 30 minutes of silence or going "I don't know, what do you think someone would ask?"

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: What else, Ter— Oh, it's also a new month, so there's new merch. There's a Miggy mug. Well it says, "Do Not Drink."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: From if you're a fan of—

Teresa: And I have to tell you, I drank out of them.

Travis: She did it.

Teresa: 'Cause I'm a rebel.

Travis: And I had to give her the Heimlich to get all the pens out. It's over at the McElroy merch store. If you're a fan of *McElroy Clubhouse*, you'll recognize it. And if you're not a fan, start watching it, they're really good. 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 Pin Up 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.

Now we mentioned it earlier, but please do continue to submit your questions, and your topics, and suggestions, and your idioms to shmannerscast@gmail.com.

Travis: I wonder if there's holiday idioms?

Teresa: Ooo, I bet there are.

Travis: Yeah, or maybe just if you have questions about—

Teresa: "You can trim my tree."

Travis: Gross.

Teresa: That's one, right?

Travis: Maybe something about like the origin of things. If you have questions about—

Teresa: No that's more innuendo I think than idiom. [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah, especially the way you said it. You couldn't see this at home, but she was kinda swingin' an arm. Like, "You can trim my tree," I hate it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But if there's like, "I've always wondered why we do this, or why we say this, or why we do this for the holidays, any holidays."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Send 'em on over.

Teresa: And say hi to Alex, because she reads every single 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?

[outro theme music plays]

[ukulele chord]

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