

## **Shmanners 440: Ask Shmanners**

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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:** I'm well.

**Travis:** It's our first Shmanners after dark in a long time. 5:30! Actually it's like, Shmanners at sundown, but...

**Teresa:** Yeah, that's true. We do normally record in the mornings.

**Travis:** Shmanners at dusk.

**Teresa:** Ooh!

**Travis:** Shmanners Nights. Do you remember...

**Teresa:** That's very Delilah of you.

**Travis:** You—oh, thank you very much. Um, I strive in all things to be like Delilah.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** As far as I know, Baywatch was the only show that did a spinoff called Baywatch: Nights. As far as I know, there weren't any other ones. But it seems like in my memory, everybody was doing something Nights.

**Teresa:** I don't know. I don't recall watching TV of that era.

**Travis:** Well, yeah. You didn't have cable until—your, uh, ancestral home didn't have cable until you were in college and didn't live there anymore.

**Teresa:** That's right. Yes.

**Travis:** Which I think has made us far different people.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, so, today we're doing our first Ask Shmanners of 2025.

**Teresa:** That's right. And...

**Travis:** Of Twenty Thunder Drive, faster than fear.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Do you feel like you're living faster than fear?

**Teresa:** I certainly do. Sometimes I feel like I cannot step on the brake at all.

**Travis:** No, so you're moving at the speed of fear right now. You need to get faster than fear.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] Okay.

**Travis:** Make fear afraid of you. That's for a different show.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** If this is your first time listening, or this is your first Ask Shmanners, we've had people who have written in their questions about specific occasions or advice on specific things. And we're gonna do our best to help.

**Teresa:** And, if you would like to submit a question, you can send those to shmannerscast@gmail.com and our wonderful researcher, writer, assistant, and friend, Alexx, reads every one, and stashes them lovingly and thoughtfully for the time when we do an Ask Shmanners. So send those any time.

**Travis:** You could also send your valet with a silver platter, and the card there sealed with wax. It's gonna be hard for the valet to find Alexx, but that is a thing you could do. Don't do that.

**Teresa:** I suppose. Here's the first one.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Roxy R. writes:

"When I threw a baby shower for a friend, I asked the friend's sister to work with the soon-to-be mom to make a slideshow of her and her husband."

How sweet.

"However, the sister refused, because she said slideshows are supposed to be a surprise, and that we should get the photos from the mom-to-be from other people. Is my friend's sister being a diva, or do I not leave the house enough?"

**Travis:** I... okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** So, without any—I don't have the expertise to back it up. But I would say, not being a diva. I think that there is just—different people have different ideas of how things are supposed—quote-unquote "supposed" to be.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Um, where it's probably that in... your sister-in-law? Wait. I'm trying to track—your friend's sister.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Is probably just, in her experience, has been to parties where the slideshow is a surprise for the person.

**Teresa:** Right. We cross checked with Emily Post, and we find that there is no hyper-specific etiquette about who should make a slideshow, and what that slideshow should consist of. So, exactly like you said, it's probably just based on her own experience. Um, and so, you know, sometimes... there are opinions about who should procure the slideshow, right? I would agree that asking the mom-to-be to procure her own photos for the event, probably not something that I would do. Um, especially since a shower is supposed to be kind of like hands-off for the person being celebrated, right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, but getting pictures that they have posted of themselves on social media, for example, that's easy enough to do, right?

**Travis:** But I would say it's also kind of a mixed bag these days, right? Because one, understandably so, people have gotten a lot more guarded about what they post on social media.

**Teresa:** That's true.

**Travis:** Like, we don't share pictures of our kids and stuff like that, right? So if we were to, like, go to your sister and say, "Make a slideshow of Bebe and Dot," right? There's not as many as if we had 'em.

**Teresa:** That's true.

**Travis:** And also, back in the day, right? Like, I think that you could go and people had either printed out photos or whatever, if you wanted to make, like, a scrapbook for example. Um, might I offer a compromise?

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Because my bet is that a lot of those pictures are, like, stored on the mother-to-be's phone or something like that, right?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** To say like, "Okay. Why don't you go and ask her to create an album, right? Of photos. And then we'll pick from them which ones to use, and we'll throw in ones that we have or that friends have or whatever." Right? So that way you're making sure that you're getting pictures from the mother-to-be that she likes, right? 'Cause it might also be like, you don't know—there's always photos, right? Where everyone else is like, "Oh my god, that's so cute!"

And you look at it and you're like, "That is not... a great picture of me."

**Teresa:** Yeah, that's true. That's true. Um, someone—it was suggested that you can, um, ask the participants of the shower to select and send a few photos that they like of the mother-to-be. I think that's a great compromise as well. Kind of make it a group project. Also, I think that like, it's all in everyone's own experience, right? I think that it could be a very sweet bonding exercise for the sister of the mom-to-be and the mom-to-be, like, finding these pictures that they'd like to share.

**Travis:** Yes. I love going through old pictures to share [crosstalk].

**Teresa:** Of, like, their childhood and things like that. I think that's a really great idea. And so no, I don't think that anyone was really in the wrong, except for like, if there were heated words about this. It was probably kind of rude-feeling, which is probably why Roxy wrote in saying that, you know, "I suggested this and the sister came back at me," right? So I do think that—

**Travis:** It sounds like opinions—yeah, yeah.

**Teresa:** I think that that was uncalled for, but I don't think that anyone was wrong. It's just different people's experiences.

**Travis:** I would also say, I think both of you, your hearts are in the right place, but I think that there's something you're missing her, which is like, yes, the element of surprise, uh, is one thing. But I always advocate for, from my point of view, asking the person, like, "Hey. We're gonna put together a slideshow. Do you want the pictures to be a surprise or do you want to help pick them out?" Right?

**Teresa:** That's a great idea.

**Travis:** Because then the pictures are still a surprise, like what we picked. But, you know, you've gotten, um... because it might be like, you both think that it's a great idea, and she's like, "I don't wanna do that," or whatever. Right? It's the same thing of like, early days of mine and Teresa's relationship, we had talks about like, "Would you ever want a surprise party?"

And we both were like, "Absolutely not."

**Teresa:** No! [laughs]

**Travis:** Gotta do some—either I want—my point of view is, I wanna be a part of planning it. That's part of the fun for me. And your point of view is like, I gotta work up the social battery to go to a party. Do not spring that on me.

**Teresa:** Yes. That's it. Alright. Here's another one. Pen A. writes:

"There's a lady that I work with who's an herbalist. I'm also really interested in plants, and I love talking to her about it, because I'm always on the lookout for treatments for my migraines. When I told her this, she came in the next day with a tea she'd made that she thought might would be helpful. Guys. This tea is disgusting."

**Travis:** Hmm.

**Teresa:** "I'm not much of a tea person in general, and when I tried this one, I couldn't drink it. It was so kind of her to give it to me and she's definitely gonna ask about it. How do I express my gratitude to her, thinking that she—without her thinking that she should give me more weird teas? Do I give it back to her? Do I come clean about how bad it smelled? My coworker is so kind, but I just can't."

**Travis:** Okay. My first blush, right? Without doing the cross referencing, is to be gentle in your honesty. Because I would say like, you could say something like, "Yeah, you know, it just didn't work for me. Tea's not really my thing, and I can be such—I can be a little bit picky when it comes to, like, flavors of things and tastes of things. But oh man, do I appreciate the effort. I'm always looking for stuff to help with my migraines, and I really appreciate you bringing that in, but it just wasn't for me."

**Teresa:** Well, to answer one question, I definitely don't think you should give it back to them. Right? Because returning a gift like that that they made for you, I think if you give it back to them, even though I'm sure you're probably trying to, like, save it from the garbage, is not shmannerly. Um, but also, you know... you did a lot of couching for that, and that's something that we do not agree with, right? At Shmanners. So I would say, "Absolutely, thank you for thinking of me. I didn't enjoy the tea. Is there anything else you could recommend?" Right?

Maybe they say, "Oh, well, how did you make it?"

And they could—you could explain, is there a different way that we could go about this? Was it maybe that, uh, like... do I need to steep it for 20 minutes, or like—I think that—

**Travis:** That might have been the problem. If you steeped it for 20 minutes, that might've been the problem, babe!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Babe, that might've been the problem!

**Teresa:** I think that there are ways that you can continue to discuss getting, like, receiving their help. But not to make it so, like, effusive that it sounds like you're making excuses.

**Travis:** And I'll also say this. You know, we get questions a lot on My Brother, My Brother, and Me about, like, you know, "I couldn't remember this person's name and now I've hung out with them a bunch of times. What do I do?"

Right? And I think that... it's a very, very slippery slope, right? Of like, because I would say the higher risk is that your very effusive in your praise of this tea, and then she, like, keeps bringing you more of it, or they keep, you know, bringing you different teas in the same kind of genre of that one or whatever. And it's like, now it's twice a week that I'm getting this tea that I can't stand. What do I do?

**Teresa:** Yeah. Honest but kind feedback is probably the best thing for this.

**Travis:** This is a thing that we have been talking to our daughters about, trying to explain the actual concept of "It's the thought that counts," right?

**Teresa:** Right, yeah.

**Travis:** Of like, making it clear that your appreciation lies in the fact that they thought about you, they made the effort, they did this thing, while also making it clear, like, this wasn't for me. Right? It's like, the thought that counts, right? They thought about it, they tried, right? They did that thing. But... this one wasn't my cup of tea.

**Teresa:** Ehh.

**Travis:** Ehh. Okay. Hit me with another one.

**Teresa:** Sailor W. writes:

"I ran into this during the holidays. If your sibling has a significant other, are you required to buy a gift for them? What if the significant other isn't joining



you for the holidays? Do you still get a gift and give it to your sibling to give to their partner? What do we do here?"

I think that this is a great question. And again, a highly, like, personal one.

**Travis:** Like, situational, maybe?

**Teresa:** Situational. Because I think that for one, it depends on [crosstalk]—

**Travis:** [simultaneously] How significant.

**Teresa:** [laughs] No. Like... part of the question was if the significant other isn't joining you for the holidays, right? So I guess it depends on, you won't be—they won't be forced to, like, watch everyone open their gifts, right? Because if that were the case, if it were like a family gathering and they were there, I definitely would want to give them something, small, small something maybe, to just have them open. Right?

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Um, but if it's like a secret Santa kind of thing, where everybody draws someone, so, like, I would include them in the secret Santa so that someone would have someone. And, you know, like... well, maybe would I include them in the secret Santa?

**Travis:** Well, here's the thing. I think the important thing in either the secret Santa or if their gonna be there or not gonna be there or anything like that, is either talking to your sibling about it, or if you have any kind of relationship with the significant other, talking to them about it. Because what you don't wanna do is, like, spring it on somebody and be like, "I got you a gift," and then they're flustered because they didn't do something for you.

**Teresa:** Right, exactly.

**Travis:** Um, and also vice versa, right? You don't want to have in your head, right, "Oh, okay, yeah, we're probably not at a point where we're giving each other gifts."

And then they bring a gift for you, or they send a gift with your sibling for you, and you're like, "I didn't think we were doing that! Oh no!"

**Teresa:** Right. I think it also depends on how long they have been seeing each other, right? I wouldn't do a gift for anything less than a year, I think. That seems very casually dating, if you haven't.

**Travis:** You say that, but we moved in together after three months.

**Teresa:** We moved in together, so that was not casual, is what I'm saying.

**Travis:** Okay. I think that's where the situation is, because I don't know that I'd want to put a time frame on it, 'cause there's lots of times where like, somebody might have a sibling who's been dating someone for, like, four months, right? And it's like, yeah, but we've hung out, right? And they're great, and I wanna, like, have a friendship with them outside of them just being, like, my signi—you know what I mean? Like, I see this heading somewhere. It seems serious. I wanna have, you know, yeah.

**Teresa:** See, that's what I'm thinking, right? Does it seem serious, or is it just casual? Like, that's what I was meaning.

**Travis:** But if they started dating on December 3rd...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** No!

**Teresa:** No!

**Travis:** Don't worry about it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] And it's always a kind gesture to give someone a gift, and I think that if you did it more like you would give, like, a hosting gift, like something that is nice but impersonal, like—

**Travis:** Food, edible, drinkable, always good, right? If they're a coffee drinker, get 'em some nice coffee. If they're a tea drinker, get 'em some tea. Wine.

**Teresa:** Or even like a coffee shop gift card or something like that, right?

**Travis:** If you're going to—'cause like, we end up baking a bunch of cookies during the holiday season anyways. Get a nice tin. Take a tin of cookies. Give it to them. Right? Because that is very much... that is—if you're like, "I didn't get a chance to check in. I don't know if they're bringing anything. I don't know what they're accepting."

Giving someone a thing of cookies is so clearly like, the thought—"I thought of you. But I didn't go out and spend, like, hundreds of dollars, so you don't need to feel badly if you didn't think about me."

**Teresa:** Exactly. I think that that is always a safe route.

**Travis:** Speaking of safe routes, I don't have a segue. But...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** How about a word from another Max Fun show?

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Travis:** Hi. We're back. Hi, we missed you! Aww! Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay. So, Paul S. writes:

"I got sober recently, but I miss the fancy feeling of pairing food with wine. Is there a fun way that I can feel fancy again without falling off the wagon?"

I completely identify with this. We have also been imbibing less as we have gotten older and more tired.

**Travis:** Lord knows.

**Teresa:** [laughs] But the—

**Travis:** For those who don't imbibe at all, too, um... yeah. More power to you. That's really good to hear. I hope that that's a decision that you're happy with and stick with.

**Teresa:** Um, so there are lots of different pairings out there on the internet. Literally all you have to do is search for what drinks to pair with blank, right? And you'll get things like, uh, cold brew coffee with spicy salami.

**Travis:** Ooh.

**Teresa:** Fresh berries with jasmine tea. Um, full body black coffee with a peanut butter and banana sandwich.

**Travis:** I bet that like, just off the top of my head, like, tomato juice and steak would be really good together.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Spicy dishes with oolong tea is another recommendation. Vanilla sweet cream cold brew with Thai style peanut wraps. That sounds delicious to me.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Um, let's see. Earl Grey with roasted or grilled chicken. For dessert, um, you can have Ceylon tea with baklava.

**Travis:** There's also... sometimes I think about it in terms of like, a lot of restaurants that you go to know, it's kind of a la carte sides, and thinking about that as, like, the pairing that goes with it. Um, man, I went to a restaurant recently. It was super fancy and it was in LA, and they brought out, like, a water book—book, like you would get a wine book.

**Teresa:** Whoa!

**Travis:** Where it had, like, probably 20 pages, each page was a different water. And I was there with our friend Tybee and we're like, "Tap. Just tap."

**Teresa:** Just tap!

**Travis:** "Tap's fine. It's all water, right? It all comes from... water? Okay, great."

**Teresa:** [laughs] Green tea—

**Travis:** [simultaneously] But that's a thing you can do.

**Teresa:** —with raspberry white chocolate cupcakes. Chocolate covered bananas with Ethiopian coffee.

**Travis:** Mmm.

**Teresa:** I mean, I'm getting hungry just thinking about this. I think in general—

**Travis:** I want coffee now is the problem.

**Teresa:** —coffee has a lot of different iterations, right? We're thinking lattes, espressos, we're thinking different cold brews or different regions go with a lot of different things, especially like chocolate. Coffee with chocolate, dessert.

**Travis:** Teas as well. I mean, there's so many different—yeah.

**Teresa:** Oh, definitely. So, like, there's lots of different things. There's different sodas you can pair, different fruit juices that bring out flavors and sweetness and other things. So yeah, there's plenty of fun out there, and the internet is your oyster for that.

**Travis:** I also... um, great book, by the way. Listeners of ours should listen to *Unreasonable Hospitality*, a book about—it's the true story—like, you know, it's a kind of biography, but a biography of a restaurant where the—basically

it's about the guy being like, "We focus so much on food. What about the experience, and how can we improve this?"

Right? And they talk about in it empowering the employees that work there to be like, you are now, like, the person who is kind of mentally in charge of thinking about, like, the—there's the wine, you know, there's a sommelier, but then they also get, like, a coffee guy, where it's like, "Hey. You're our new coffee guy. That's your job now. And your job is like, beer guy."

And it keeps extending out to, like, glassware, flatware, you know, silverware. And so as—after, like, reading that book, as we go out to eat and stuff, I think about the plates. Not, like, the plating, but the plates themselves that have gone with it, and how that interacts with, you know, my experience of the food. The glassware, the silverware, everything.

There's a place in Cincinnati called Son of a Butcher—

**Teresa:** Oh yeah.

**Travis:** —where when you order a steak, they bring, like, a magnet tray of all different kinds of steak knives with, like, different shapes, different handles.

**Teresa:** And they come out and they say, "Choose your weapon."

**Travis:** Oh my god.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** It's the best. I've... I will talk about it forever as like, nothing beats that feeling for me of like, "Ooh la la! I get to pick my own knife!"

And so things like that where it's like, that pairing of the experience with it of like, how did that make you feel? The fact that it was, like, laid out like this, and think about like this, right? And extending beyond just, like, the drink that goes with it is another opportunity to feel fancy.

**Teresa:** If I could go back to coffee for a moment, here is another question. Erica M. writes:

"My friends and I have been getting into throwing very fancy dinner parties lately. They've been really fun and delightful, but I have a question. Is it a thing to serve coffee at the end of a fancy meal? It seems like a weird time to caffeinate."

And the answer is yes, this is actually a thing. Especially in Europe, there is a coffee course at the very end of the meal. It can be included in dessert, hence affogato, right?

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Um, and so here is some advice from Amy Vanderbilt, uh, who was famous for parties, of course. [clears throat]

"Many hostesses today serve only decaf coffee after dinner. However, it is possible to serve both, and it is thoughtful to offer guests a choice. To accommodate your guests you may also want to serve milk or cream. And most people are correct in the assumption that coffee and dessert go well together, and traditionally after dinner coffee does come at the very end of the meal. At the most formal, traditional kind of dinner, the end of the dessert course, you should put your napkin on the table, rise, and then tell the women around to follow you to the living room for after dinner coffees and liqueurs. And on the way, ask if anyone would like to stop to use the restroom."

So, this was back in the 50's, right? This is from Complete Book of Etiquette by Amy Vanderbilt. And as fancy dinner parties go, you definitely don't have to separate guests anymore to adjourn to different rooms. You can all still stay together. But coffee and brandies and things like that for fancy parties are usually taken in a more, like, kind of lounge-y way, and less formally at the table.

**Travis:** I've always just kind of assumed—I guess I've reasoned that a coffee course became standard because of alcohol consumption?

**Teresa:** Hmm.

**Travis:** Right? Where it was like, "Alright. Now you gotta get home. Here's a cup of coffee," right? And the assumption—

**Teresa:** Sober you up. [laughs]

**Travis:** The assumption being, right? That this is gonna keep you level. Which doesn't work.

**Teresa:** Nope.

**Travis:** As I have heard say, drinking coffee when your drunk just makes you more awake drunk. Um, so—but I assumed that that was the logic behind it. Of like, "Alright. Time to, I don't know, drive your carriage home, your Model T or whatever. Here's... uh, some coffee. Get on outta here."

**Teresa:** Right. I also think that traditionally espresso drinks were probably served, more likely. I mean, because those have a little less caffeine.

**Travis:** Well, yeah. Because it's a smaller amount of it.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Right. So you're not... getting the same—I'm trying to remember what it is. I was actually just looking that up because it's... I think what it is is that there's less in espresso because... less content? Right? Less volume?

**Teresa:** I mean, it is a smaller serving, for sure.

**Travis:** Yes. Light roast... retains slightly more caffeine by weight than darker roasts, and so espresso being a very high, you know, dark roast, I assume, there's less, and it's concentrated. All that stuff.

**Teresa:** Right, and it's a smaller cup.

**Travis:** Yes. It feels cool to drink it. It feels very classy.



**Teresa:** I used to have a set of demitasse cups, which is very small.

**Travis:** Okay, hit me with another one. Hit me!

**Teresa:** Okay. Cat A. writes:

"I turned 30 recently!"

**Travis:** Congratulations.

**Teresa:** Happy birthday.

"And a bunch of people in my family sent me flowers. But I'm allergic to most flowers, and having so many in my house is constantly making me sneeze. How can I ask people not to send me flowers without sounding ungrateful?"

This is a very common problem. My mother especially is allergic to lilies. Uh, so what she ends up doing is cutting out the stamen of the flower that contains the pollen. She'll do that right when she gets them, cut them out while she's trimming the flowers or whatever, and that helps her a lot. I don't know if that would help you, Cat. But that's just a suggestion.

But I think that you need to be direct about this. This is your health, um, and so you can say, "Thank you for this kind gesture, but I'm allergic to flowers."

I think that it's important to advocate for your medical needs.

**Travis:** Yeah, I think so too. But I... I don't know if this is, uh, uh, if Emily Post would approve of this, but I do think there's a way to do it in a playful way of like, "Oh my god, they're so beautiful. They do make me sneeze a lot, though, so maybe next time chocolates. [fake laughter]" Right? Because while I do think it's very important to advocate for one's health, both mental and physical, I think that if you come at it from too serious an angle, it's going to make it seem to the person you're talking to, like, it's a way bigger deal that they got you these flowers. You know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Sure, sure, yes.

**Travis:** But if you're like, "I appreciate it. But it makes me sick." Right? Like, I think tone and wording, right? Of just being like, "I love—they're beautiful and I wish—oh my god, I wish I could keep 'em," or whatever. You know what I mean? "But maybe, ha ha, candy."

Right? And so that way it's like, more of a playful thing, and less of a "I'm judging you for sending me flowers" thing, would be my advice.

**Teresa:** And also I think that it would be important to talk to each family member, um, so that you can, like, not make it into an embarrassing thing, right? This isn't like a group announcement, right? Or—or! Maybe if you sent out, like, a group text to everyone. "Thank you so much everyone for thinking about me on my birthday. Next year, instead of flowers, how about I get arrangements of candy bars," or whatever, right? Or "You can donate to my favorite charity." Or, you know, those kind of things.

**Travis:** That could also be a thing where a little distance to it, like, as you're nearing your 31st birthday, saying like, "And while I loved all the flowers last year, turns out it just triggered my allergies, so this year maybe candy," right?

**Teresa:** Or whatever.

**Travis:** I want candy. I think I want candy. It's the third time I've said "Or candy," and I didn't have another... thing to put there.

**Teresa:** Well, we were just talking about chocolate and desserts and things like that.

**Travis:** That's probably that. It's what's stuck in my head.

**Teresa:** Um, here's one. Rachel K. asks:

"I feel like I apologize too much in my work emails. How can I be both kind and assertive?"

This is a great question. This is something that a lot of people, I find mostly women, are trained almost to do. Kind of like apologize for the space that we take up. And I think that there is a difference, certainly, between if you messed up, you should apologize and take responsibility for the things that you've done. But I think we need to remember that... and myself as well, I usually have to go through and delete exclamation marks, right?

**Travis:** I love exclamation marks!

**Teresa:** [laughs] Or "I just wanted to," or "Is it okay," or "Would you mind," and things like that. There's a difference between being kind and polite and apologizing for the space that you take up.

Here is something that you can actually do, though. If you are apologizing to someone in a way because of your—you feel bad, or you think that that's kinder, flip it around and see if you can thank them for something. "I'm sorry that I didn't respond to your email sooner" becomes "Thank you for your patience, I've been dealing with an influx of emails," or something like that, right?

**Travis:** Yes. I would also encourage you to see this as a tool in your tool set more than a weakness, because there are times, right? If you're emailing someone who maybe can be difficult to work with, or difficult to approach, or that you're worried, like, "Ooh, they're gonna come back at me for this," mindfully using that, like, I—that passive voice, right? In a way to still make your point and get what you want, or to get to a solution, but you're doing it consciously and mindfully, it is a useful tool to have. To have that kind of like, tap dancing language. Like, "I know, this is so frustrating, but we do—if we could just—" right? And it's like, as long as you're doing it purposefully and mindfully, it can be useful.

**Teresa:** Sure. Here are some other suggestions.

**Travis:** I use it all the time.

**Teresa:** Quickly. [laughs] "I just wanted to check in" becomes "When can I expect an update?"

"No problem" becomes "Always happy to help!"

"Hopefully that makes sense" becomes "Let me know if you have questions," right? So there are ways to get your points across without being so profusive about it, and apologizing for taking up space in your workplace.

**Travis:** I also think that there is a... a bit of a situational thing to it, right? Like, say you're looking for an investor in a thing, right? Or you're, you know, writing to get grants for a thing you're working on or whatever, right? In that circumstance, being a little more, uh, deferent... ? Right? "I—you know, I just wanted to check back in."

**Teresa:** Sure. Read the room.

**Travis:** Versus, like, somebody who was supposed to deliver something on time, and you're waiting on that information, or you're working together or whatever. And that is not a, "I just wanted to." That is a, "Hey. I can't move forward with this until I get that information. This is time sensitive." Right?

**Teresa:** Yeah. "When can I expect an update?"

**Travis:** Like, if you've emailed—like, if you have interviewed for a job, right? And you haven't gotten an update when they said they were going to, being a little more passive in there, like, "I just wanted to follow up and see if there was anything else that you needed from me in the consideration," right?

Instead of being like, "Hey! You said Tuesday and it's Wednesday! What's up with that, man?"

**Teresa:** [laughs] Alright. Last question. Andrea B. asks:

"I don't know if this is exactly etiquette, but I felt like you could help me. I thrift a lot and I love vintage clothes, but I'm constantly nervous whenever it comes to cleaning them. Do you have any advice on how to keep my precious thrift finds in good condition?"

As always, you're welcome to check the tags. A lot of tags from, uh—from yesteryear will actually have instructions for cleaning written out, although nowadays they tend to be symbols, right?

**Travis:** Though there are circumstances where if it's vintage enough, right? Or if it was lovingly worn enough, that that tag might not be present anymore.

**Teresa:** That's true, that's true. And I would say that hand washing always works. Right? Um, there are different, like, very gentle soaking solutions that you can purchase. Um, there are very, like, one or two ingredient detergents or soaps or things that you can use.

**Travis:** This is where you need to make friends with a theater tech costume department person.

**Teresa:** Ah, yes.

**Travis:** Um, everybody should have at least one friend that works in a costume shop so that you can go to 'em and be like, "Hey. What's this made of? How do I wash—what do I—is this just, like, a Febreze and put in the wind kind of thing, or what are we lookin' at?"

**Teresa:** Um, some garments are very sensitive to heat, so I would recommend washing all your vintage in cold water. Um, and then also sometimes you just have to spot clean, right? You might not be able to fit an entire vintage quilt in your washing machine, so there are things like vodka sprays, um, or spot cleaning, right? With, like, a stain. Or I'm told that OxiClean is very gentle. That can be used.

I would be careful and test it on a—like, an inconspicuous spot, because you might end up having to clean the whole thing in OxiClean if you treat a stain, and then that stain is much cleaner than the area around it. Also, steaming can be used for heavier fabrics. Um, if you find that, you know, they just have a strange smell, like they've been sitting around for a while kind of smell—

**Travis:** Yeah, musty, yeah.

**Teresa:** Not like a dirty smell, or there's no visible stains. Steaming can help. Um, but I would also recommend that you should hang things or dry them flat, because dryers were not a thing a long time ago. Most everyone hung things out on the line to dry. Um, or on radiators or whatever.

**Travis:** Also, especially if you're [[getting new?]] to it, be careful what you hang on hangers.

**Teresa:** Oh, sure.

**Travis:** 'Cause some stuff you'll end up—

**Teresa:** Might be too heavy.

**Travis:** Yeah, you'll end up getting those kind of stretched corners, where the corners of the hangers are. Some things are kind of like—

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, drying flat is good for sweaters and knits.

**Travis:** Dry flat or, like, fold them to store over the hanger, right? If that's what you're doing.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, right.

**Travis:** Um, that's gonna do it for us! Thank you for all these wonderful questions.

**Teresa:** Keep 'em comin'!

**Travis:** Yeah, I love doing Ask Shmanners. Um, we want to say thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we wouldn't be able to do this show. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we would not be able to do this show. And thank you to you for listening. We—

**Teresa:** And submitting questions, 'cause we would not—

**Travis:** [simultaneously] And submitting questions!

**Teresa:** —be able to do this show.

**Travis:** Yeah, we couldn't have done this one.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, that's an excellent point. Go check out mcelroymerch.com. I think by the time—no. The—wait, what day is it? You'll hear this on the 31st, so tomorrow there's going to be new stuff in the McElroy Merch store. Go check that out. My Brother, My Brother, and Me and Adventure Zone are coming to Florida February 20th, 21st, and 22nd. I believe we're doing My Brother, My Brother and Me and Adventure Zone in Tampa on the... 20th and 21st. And then we're somewhere else on the 22nd. I'm trying to do it off the top of my head.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** But if you go to [bit.ly/mcelroytours](https://bit.ly/mcelroytours) you'll find it all there, or you can just go to [mcelroy.family](https://mcelroy.family), find everything out there. 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.

Like we mentioned at the top of our episode, we are always taking questions, and topic suggestions, and idioms, and all sorts of things. Uh, please contact us, [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto: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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