

Shmanners 527: 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 doing okay. The kids are back to school.

Travis: What!?

Teresa: I am realizing exactly how little time I actually have [giggles] during the day, where they're both gone. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah. Dot is only doing half days, so she comes home at 10:30. She's on time— It just feels cruel.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause it's like, oh, we gotta wake up early. But don't worry, she's almost home before you get to think about, "Ah, the time I have."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: So it's not like we're going to go see movies and partying now. So—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's fine. She's loving it, everybody's loving it. School year's going great. And you know what school year makes me think of, Teresa? Learning.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: You know what learning makes me think of?

Teresa: Oh?

Travis: Asking.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: And you know what asking makes me think of? Questions.

Teresa: Okay, right! You— You know, the segue is an art.

Travis: Thank you.

Teresa: I don't know if that was a masterpiece, but it was good.

Travis: No, that was more like the machine Segway than anything else.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But we're doing an *Ask Shmanners*, is what I'm going for. I have questions.

Teresa: We are! So if you have etiquette questions, you can send them to shmannerscast@gmail.com. We love hearing from you guys, and your questions

and topics are always welcome and appreciated. Also, shoutouts. Thanks for everybody just saying hi to Alexx! She reads every email, and she loved reading them, looking for questions.

Travis: Except for that one. You know which one we're talking about.

Teresa: Oh, don't even.

Travis: No, I'm just kidding. It's great. So first question, Teresa.

Teresa: "My friend has been getting a lot healthier lately, which is awesome. Not only are they losing weight, it just seems like they're in a better mood all around. Is there a way to compliment them without implying there was ever anything wrong with them or the way they look?"

So it is great to tell our friends that they're doing an awesome job, right? But we really do need to walk, you know, a little tightrope here as far as commenting on people's bodies. Right? Because weight does not equal health.

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: And so someone could be very thin, and that is one of the beauty standards of our society at the moment, and be in very poor health. And someone could be larger – maybe even taller, or maybe mostly muscular, or something that's just outside of the current beauty standards – and be very healthy.

Travis: I would argue that where I'm at now in my life, when— You know, I'm probably about 30 pounds heavier than I was in my 20s, but I make a lot more healthy choices now.

Teresa: Oh, yeah. Totally.

Travis: Right? And I'm treating my body a lot better, and treating my brain a lot better than I did then. I would also say not just you can't equate weight and health, but also to drill down on it a little bit, you can't equate losing weight with getting healthier, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because there's also a lot of illnesses that cause you to lose weight, there's a lot of— There's just a lot more to it than that.

Teresa: So what we're saying is a person's body is their own business, right? But it does seem like, from this question, that you want to congratulate your friend on making healthier choices, which I think *is* a good thing to do.

Travis: I would also say, though, that this is— Before we get too much further into it, this is also like, there's two different answers to this, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because there's a general answer of how, in general, you might address this. And there's also like, what kind of specific relationship do you have with this person, and what—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? Because I have friends that I'd be like, "Hey, you're working out. You're looking— I'm seeing them muscles pops, and you're getting there," right? That kind of thing, I'd be way more comfortable saying that to a friend of mine than some—

Teresa: A closer friend, yeah.

Travis: Yeah. Than like, oh, there's another parent of a child in Bebe's class, and I see them at drop-off. And I wouldn't be like, "Hey, getting ripped!" [laughs] Right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That might be maybe a little inappropriate.

Teresa: Right. This person said that their friend seems happier, and that is a

great way to comment on the way that they're appearing to you. "You seem happier. It makes me really happy to see that you're happy." That's great, right? Or do they have a physical accomplishment that you could congratulate them on?

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: Maybe they're doing a Couch to 5K, or whatever it is, right? And you can say, "That's really awesome. That's inspiring," or something like that. So the way that you want to do it is you want to center the way that your friend *feels*, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And the *accomplishments*, without trying to make them self-conscious.

Travis: Right. There is also, I think, if that person is working out to get stronger, that's the reason I started going to the gym. 'Cause my kids started getting bigger, and I was like, "I wanna be able to lift up both my kids without pulling something." And they keep getting bigger, so I gotta get swole-er.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And that, I think, is a—

Teresa: I think at one point, it does— The two lines do converge, and then cross each other.

Travis: [???], I don't care if my kids are 26 and 23. I'm gonna be able to pick 'em up on both hands like Atlas or something, you know?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm doing it. But I think that is a— If someone's working out to build muscle, that's a thing that's not about, I don't think, health or anything like that. If they're building muscle and that's the goal, and you can see that the muscle's building, you can say, "Oh, your arms are looking really defined." Right? I think that's a fact, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "I can see the definition of your muscles in your arms." Fact. Right?

Teresa: Yeah! Yeah. I think this goes back to— We've talked before about there's a way to compliment someone without making it about the body specifically.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Like if someone looks good in a dress, "That dress looks great on you."

Travis: Exactly. Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Instead of talking about the body in the dress. Alright, ready for another one?

Travis: Yeah. This one is, "I sent a text message *about* someone *to* the person I was talking about! Help."

Teresa: I didn't know that we were gonna go back and forth on this! I like it. I like the energy.

Travis: It makes me feel involved, yeah.

Teresa: Okay. That's great! Do you have an idea? What you want—

Travis: Uh, you gotta move.

Teresa: No.

Travis: You gotta move away. Burn your—

Teresa: Mm-mm.

Travis: You say, "Hey, my kid got a hold of the phone."

Teresa: We don't pack our bags and move away on *Shmanners*.

Travis: You lie. You lie, then.

Teresa: That's only *MBMBaM*.

Travis: You lie your little butt off. You lie through your teeth.

Teresa: Eugh...

Travis: And you say, "That was a joke! Hahaha."

Teresa: "Hahaha." No. I don't think so. I think that you have to own up to it. You have to say, as quickly as you realize it— I mean, obviously they know that this was not for them, right? But depending upon how rough the message was, it might be very difficult for you to mend this relationship, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: The website Lifehacker gives a great example of how to handle this, saying, "If you text or Slack your coworker Jill a message that says, 'Jill never shuts up about her stupid ugly chihuahua,' or whatever, you can't just say, 'Hey, that wasn't for you.' Jill is well aware that it wasn't for her, so you're just gonna have to eat it on this one. Say, 'Hey, Jill. I'm sorry about that. I'm in a bad mood today, but I shouldn't have insulted you or Scrappy. I'm finding it hard to concentrate today, and your talking was distracting me, but that's no excuse for being so rude.'"

I love this apology, because it explains the reasons without making it somebody else's fault. You're accepting the fault. "I sent that on accident. Yes, it was distracting. That's not a reason to be so mean."

Travis: And I think the important thing is you're not gonna *fix* it, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: There is not a way that you're gonna 100 percent walk it back, and nothing has happened. But this is something that we try to instill in our girls. Everyone gets frustrated.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Everyone has feelings, everyone's allowed to express those feelings, right? So there are times where I get frustrated at Bebe, and I'll be like, "Oh, my God. Just I don't know, man. I don't have the answer to every question. Why do you ask so many questions!?" And I could leave it there, right? But now, I'm making my kid feel bad about being inquisitive and asking all these questions. But the fact is, I'm also allowed to be frustrated, right?

So the important thing is to say, "Hey, listen. I got frustrated, and I expressed that frustration towards you. Sometimes, I get overwhelmed when there's a lot of questions and I don't know how to answer. I *love* that you ask questions. And the fact that I got frustrated about it is about me feeling overwhelmed, and not because you did anything wrong." In that explanation, I'm not saying I shouldn't get frustrated.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Or I was wrong to be frustrated. I'm clarifying that it was about me.

Teresa: You expressed it inappropriately.

Travis: Right. "It's about me, that I got— I want you to understand that that was from me being overwhelmed and frustrated, not because you were doing anything wrong. I'm allowed to *feel* frustrated, but I want you to know that it's not about *you* or anything *you* were doing. I was just frustrated in the moment." So I think the fact of the matter is, all that happened was you were frustrated about this person, or you have these negative feelings about this person. And instead of you feeling them in private, right, now you're feeling them in public.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But it's not like you and that person had a super great, awesome

relationship anyways.

Teresa: Oh, well...

Travis: Because— Well, in that moment—

Teresa: But you might still have to work with this person, see this person every day.

Travis: No, no, no. But what I'm saying is, it might actually end up being for the good? Because if you were feeling these frustrations, you're feeling these issues in private, this might just force you to confront those and have a conversation about it.

Teresa: Okay. Okay.

Travis: And deepen it, right, in that way. But also, apologize, explain. Don't try to cover it up, or back out of it, or anything like that.

Teresa: Yeah. Next question. "If someone gives me a present that's supposed to be displayed or worn, what are the rules for where it's displayed/how often it's worn?"

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: This is a question that *I* have dealt a lot with. Because I, as far as gifts go, really enjoy a practical gift. Something that I cannot use, I often feel like the gift giver maybe didn't think about the way that *I* like to get gifts. They think about the way that they like to *give* gifts, instead of the way that I like to *get* gifts.

Travis: Why are you looking at me so much? What have I done?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: What did I do? Well, I think— Yeah, there's that, and then there's also, I

think, sometimes— Okay, so for me, right? And I think that there are a lot of people like me. Me giving someone a gift is a chance for me to show, “I know you,” right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Like, love language very much so, right? So to be able to say, “I know the kind of stuff that you like. I know you had mentioned this stuff. I thought you would be really into this,” right? And sometimes, that’s a miss, right?

Teresa: Sure, yeah.

Travis: Sometimes, you’re like, “I really thought you’d be into this.” And they’re like, “That’s not for me.”

I also— Before we even get to the answer, can I just say? I think at least here in the US, and at least the culture *I* have experienced, I think we put way too much pressure and stuff into gifts. I think it’s a little bit unhealthy, the way we think about gifts and culture and everything, of this like, “Do you love it? You love it, right? I nailed it, right?” Like, it’s so—

Teresa: Mm. Okay, yeah.

Travis: We put so much importance into it.

Teresa: Yeah, because it’s a— We have a very materialistic society, right?

Travis: Right, yes. That it’s become a way of like, “And I spent a lot of money on that,” or it’s really nice, or it’s really fancy.

Teresa: “And you *better* be grateful.”

Travis: Right, exactly. That there is a certain amount of expectation associated with it.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: So now, to get into the answer, what I would do— And this is not me doing any research, this is just me speaking from the heart...

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I probably wouldn't say anything. But if I were going to actually do something about it, right? Open the gift, "Oh, my God. Thank you so much. I really appreciate this," right? And then later say, "Hey. I want you to know, I really appreciate the gift. It's not really my style," or "I really appreciate the gift. I don't know that it's something I have use for," right?

Teresa: This is great. This is great. I love this. Not exactly what the question is asking. The question is asking, for example, if someone gifted you a piece of art, what are the rules about displaying it, or how often, right? Like, do you have to hang this in your house in a place of honor forever, or do you have to wear that sweater every time your aunt comes over?

Travis: No, no.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Definitely the second one, no. Right? Because if I give someone a t-shirt, if I see 'em wear that t-shirt once in the rest of my life, awesome.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: But expecting them to do it every time— But also, sometimes someone has ADHD. And if you give them a piece of art, and they're like, "Oh, my God, this is amazing," and they truly think it's amazing. And then they forget to hang it up.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: I have a piece of art that's a beautiful, beautiful woodcutting thing Dad got me of a thing, and I look at it all the time as it leans against my bookcase.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I think about hanging it up. I'm like, "I gotta hang that thing up! And I will. What's that over there?" And I'm gone! Off on another adventure.

Teresa: I mean, if you think about it, it is still displayed. You're still looking at it. It's just not on the wall.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: It's on the floor. Anyway, here's the thing. A gift is not an *obligation*, right? It's very thoughtful to receive a gift. But in order for it to be a true *gift*, right? No strings are attached to it.

Travis: Now, that's— Now, hold on. That's true, in a perfect utopian society.

Teresa: Yes. Yes.

Travis: But you know that that's not always the case, right?

Teresa: I know. But I don't think— Okay. For example, if I gave my friend Maggie a mug, right? She loves mugs!

Travis: Sure!

Teresa: Do I expect her to use it, and remember every time I come over to use that mug? No! I expect she's gonna put it in a cabinet, she's gonna take it out when it comes into rotation. She's gonna look at it and think of me. And that's enough, right? It doesn't *have*—

Travis: Well, that's 'cause you're a kind and thoughtful human being. I'm saying, there are definitely people in this world that if they get you a painting, and then they come over to your house a week later and that painting's not hanging up, they're gonna be upset. And I bring it up because of this. That's *them*, right? Because this is an important thing I think about in manners and etiquette that we talk about often. That's their own thing.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: They might be upset. But *you* didn't do anything wrong.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Right? Because there are processes and procedures that we talk about all the time of the right way to do this, and this, and this. Right? That we can explain to someone, "Hey. If you're unsure—"

We can explain that there is a window of time for thank-you notes, right? Where it's just like, okay. If you are worried, "Oh, is it too late to send one back?" Here's the general window of time, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But there's also then plenty of people who are like, "I gave you a gift yesterday, and I still haven't gotten a thank-you note." And *that's*—

Teresa: Well, okay, yes.

Travis: *That's* on them. So what *we're* saying is us, Teresa and Travis, are telling you you're not a bad person if you don't wear that sweater or whatever when that person comes over. We have no control over what *they* [laughs] think about you. But *we're* telling you, you're off the hook.

Teresa: Here's something that you can do, okay? Say you receive a wreath, or a decorative candle, or something. At that occasion, when the person is there, maybe it's like a party or whatever, put it out! Don't stack it up with the rest of the gifts. Display it for the party. Light the candle right away, okay?

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: And *then* you can see – everyone can see, right – that you *enjoy* the gift, but it doesn't have to stay out all the time, okay? So that's what you could do. Same thing with like, you get a novelty t-shirt for Christmas or whatever.

Before the gift giver, maybe your mom, leaves— My mom would never give a novelty t-shirt, but my *dad*...

Travis: Has many times.

Teresa: ... has definitely. Before they leave the next morning, wear it to breakfast, right? And then you are under no obligation to ever wear it again in their presence.

Travis: And then you can fly it up to the rafters, like you're retiring a jersey.

Teresa: [laughs] So you don't have to keep the wreath or the candle out all the time. You don't have to wear that t-shirt in your permanent rotation. Just enough to let the gift giver know that you do like the gift, I think is a great idea.

Travis: Okay. Now, I have a question for you.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: Do you want to hear a thank-you note for our sponsors?

Teresa: Yes, I do.
[theme music plays]

Travis: We wanna say thank you to Zola.

Teresa: Thanks, Zola!

Travis: Zola, thank you for everything. Do you remember when I fell down that well? And Zola dove in after me—

Teresa: That's not what Zola is for.

Travis: No, that was Lassie. You're right. Sorry, Zola. I got Zola confused for Lassie, because just like Lassie, Zola's always people.

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: Always there for people.

Teresa: That one *was* a masterful se—

Travis: Thank you very—

Teresa: That was a masterpiece of a segue.

Travis: Thank you very much! You know what? I did go to segue college.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Speaking of segue college, Zola is the— [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Absolutely nothing. But when you're getting married, it's not just about the big day. It's about all the days along the way, and Zola is here for all of them. I was actually recently talking with a friend of mine, and I was like, "Hey, you guys are getting married soon."

And he was like, "Yeah, in a month, and we're over it."

I was like, "What do you mean?"

And he was like, "Well, we're past solving all the big things."

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: "And now, it's just little things we never would have thought of keep popping up, and it's getting very frustrating, and we're ready to just be married already."

Teresa: I feel like that's a natural stage. I feel like we went through it.

Travis: Mm-hmm!

Teresa: We were like, “I’m done— I’m done! Let’s just elope!”

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And you know what? If that happens to you, I totally understand. And if you do elope, I also totally understand.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: But Zola can make things easier, so *maybe* that feeling is just passing.
[chuckles]

Travis: Yeah. Whether it’s save-the-dates, invitations, wedding websites, registries, all of that stuff, Zola’s design sets the scene for the kind of wedding it’s going to be. Plus, Zola can suggest venues and vendors, and make the experience even more memorable. Man, I wish we had had Zola at the time, ‘cause we were just— We had a huge bind— I know we’ve talked about this, but we had just a notebook where we had—

Teresa: It was a spiral notebook.

Travis: Yeah. We had it with us, 24/7. And we’d just think of like, “Oh! Haven’t figured that out yet,” and write it down with a question mark, right? Don’t do that. Don’t be like us.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Basically planning a wedding in the Dark Ages. Use Zola! Start planning at Zola.com/shmanners. That’s Zola.com/shmanners.

[ad changes]

Emily: I’m Emily Heller.

Lisa: And I'm Lisa Hanawalt.

Emily: And we're the host of *Baby Geniuses*.

Lisa: We've been doing our podcast for over ten years.

Emily: When we started, it was about trying to learn something new every episode.

Lisa: Now, it's about us trying to actively get stupider. And it's working!

Emily: [laughs] Hang out with us, and you'll hear us chat about...

Lisa: Gardening.

Emily: Horses.

Lisa: Various problems with our butts.

Emily: And all the weird stuff that makes us horny.

Lisa: That's so weird. All that stuff.

Emily: [laughs]

Lisa: *Baby Geniuses*, a show for adult idiots.

Emily: Every other week on Maximum Fun.

Theme Song: *Baby Geniuses*, we know everything. *Baby Geniuses*, tell us something you don't know!

[ad changes]

[bell dings]

Announcer: The following pro wrestling contest is scheduled for [one fall?!]
Making their way to the ring from the *Tights and Fights* podcast are the baddest
trio of audio, the hair to beware, Danielle Radford!

Danielle: It really is great hair!

Announcer: The Brit with a permit to hit, Lindsey Kelk!

Lindsey: The queen is dead! Long live the queen!

Announcer: And the fast-talking, fist-clocking Hal Lublin!

Hal: See, I can wrestle *and* be an announcer!

Danielle: Get ready for *Tights and Fights*!

Lindsey: Listen every Saturday, or face the pain!

Announcer: Find us on Maximum Fun! Now, ring the bell!

[bell dings]

[ad break ends]

Travis: Okay. Teresa, you ready for another question?

Teresa: I am.

Travis: Okay. Let's do another question. "Can I tip on a gift card?"

Teresa: Uh... Maybe? Maybe you can? But I think that the real thing is, that is
probably more trouble than it's worth, right?

Travis: [sighs] Okay, here's the thing, though. Here's what I would say. If you

have a gift card, and whether it's for a service, like you're going for a massage, or you're going to get your nails done, or you're going for whatever, right? Or it's for a dinner, right, and it's somewhere fancy that you're going out for dinner. I would *call* the place ahead of time.

Teresa: Oh, okay. Okay.

Travis: And say, "Hey. I'm making a reservation, or making an appointment, and I have a gift card. And before I come, I wanna see if it's able to tip on the gift card, or if I should plan on tipping a different way." Because if someone gave me like, "Here's a 200 dollar gift card to go out to dinner," and I went out to dinner. And then it was like, "Yeah, we don't accept the tip on that." So now, it's like, oh, no. I need to do like 40 dollars for a tip, and I kind of wasn't planning on that. Oh, no. What, like—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: That can get very tricky. And what you don't want to do is just not tip.

Teresa: Right. I definitely agree with that. Let's be prepared. There are ways around it, okay? If that occurs, right, maybe somebody's system is equipped to do that. Maybe it will take a lot of hassle to do that. So here is another *idea*. What if you buy something small in the denomination that you wish, and then maybe not take that with you? Or just—

Travis: So you're saying like, pay with the gift card, and then say, "Ring me up for a soda or a cookie, run my card, and then I can tip you on the card."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Yes, okay. So that way, you're tipping on your debit card, or credit card, or whatever.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And paying with the gift card.

Teresa: Right. Because the systems usually can do— I mean, I'm picturing like Square, right? Where you do the coffee at the coffee shop, and it says, "Would you like to tip?" And it has the ten, the 15, the 20, the 25, or whatever. If you did a *gift card*, you might not be able to do that. But if you buy something else, something small like a soda, right? Then you could tip on your credit card.

Travis: Well— And listen, I'm about to sound... like an almost-40-year-old dad. 'Cause I am! But you know what every place, just about every place, always accepts?

Teresa: Cash.

Travis: Cash money. These days, man, I tell you what. There are times— Like for example, we travel a lot. And we do a lot of live shows. And I always tip housekeeping, right? So when I leave, I leave money to say, "Hey. Thank you for cleaning my room." And it started to become more and more frequent, where it's like the day to check out. And I'm like, "Oh, I don't have any cash." And I'll go down to the front desk, and I'm like, "Hey, do you guys have an ATM here?"

And they're like, "Oh, no. We don't do cash in the hotel." And I'm like, "Oh. Uh, okay." And what I'm saying is, I try to bring cash with me. Because you never think about needing it, right until the moment where it's just like, "Oh, no. I just valet parked, and I need to pay this person like five dollars, and I don't have it." Right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Or something like that, man. And there are times where it's just like, "I don't get— Where do you get cash? *What!?*" I try to travel with it now.

Teresa: You can get cash back at some tills, like some grocery stores or whatever, right?

Travis: That's true. Yeah.

Teresa: Convenience stores. But like you said, it's better to be prepared. You can call ahead. If you really wanna tip on the gift card, or you can do a second

transaction like I said, with something small. Whatever— The smallest amount that they'll be able to run your card for, that you're gonna use or drink or whatever anyway. Or bring the cash.

Travis: This next question hits so close to home...

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: That it's like it hit in my living room.

Teresa: "I am so awful at texting back. I don't even know why, half the time. It might be an anxiety thing? How can I let me know that my friends know that I'm not avoiding them?"

Travis: You are not alone, question asker!

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Can I tell you what happens to me, what gets me? Because it'll pop up, like my notifications pop up on my phone. Without even unlocking the phone.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: I pick it up, and it's like a one-sentence thing. It's like, "Okay, we'll meet there at 8:00." And I see it, and I'm like, "Awesome." And I say, *out loud*...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Like, "Great. That works, yes," whatever. And then I put my phone away.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And then I end up with like 500 unread messages. And I'm like, I'm reading the messages! I saw them with my eyeballs.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I just didn't *open* it. And I didn't respond to it.

Teresa: You know, this is such a universal feeling. Because the UK-based website Stylist reached out to a therapist to see if they could gain some insights on to why our phone notifications can feel so overwhelming, right? Dr. [Alana Toroney?]: "It could be busy-ness or underlying anxieties that lead to someone being a bad replier. It can also be about control. When we feel anxious and overwhelmed, we might try to take control of the situation in the way of, 'It's up to me when I get back to someone.' It's a way of avoiding a feeling of being coerced into engaging with someone or something in a moment when we don't wish to."

Travis: There's also— Man, the number of times where— And it's pretty cliché, I think, at this point. But when people talk about neurodivergent stuff and spoons, of just like, a question will come in and the person has no way of knowing this, right?

Teresa: Of course.

Travis: But I'm dealing with like, "Oh, no. Dot's having a meltdown, and the dogs are barking 'cause the mailman just dropped off whatever, and I'm trying to figure out dinner. I can't answer this right now."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? And it's just like, that's nothing— They didn't do anything wrong. They didn't know. But I can't stop what I'm doing and be like, "I don't know, man. What are *you* up to?" I can't do that right now.

Teresa: Right. So a couple of practical tips would be, if you do not like this behavior in yourself, there's a couple of things that you can do. So maybe you can rearrange your apps or notifications in a way that are a little more pleasing, right? Maybe as soon as you open your phone, you don't wanna be faced with a wall of notifications, right? Maybe even setting aside some time in your day to exclusively focus on replying to messages, like—

Travis: That's what I do.

Teresa: Like the admin hour, right?

Travis: Yeah. That's what I do, where it's like, okay. I try to wait, because we have a lot of people who work in all the different time zones, and I have friends across the country and stuff. Where I'm like, "Okay. It's 1:00 PM. Time to go through and answer emails and texts and everything," right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: But I will also say this. Normalize bumping stuff, right? This is something we do in our work chats. It's something that my friends and I do, emails do. Where it's just like, I send someone this thing. Even if it's just like, "Hey. What are you up to this weekend?" And they didn't answer. 24 hours goes by. And you just write, "Bump," and send it back. Right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because sometimes, I get the thing. I'm like, "Oh, I'm gonna answer that." And then it goes out of my head. It's gone! And then I get that bump notification. I'm like, "Oh, this is a better time to do it," right? But you gotta wait — You can't do it like 20 minutes later, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Do it the next day.

Teresa: So don't beat yourself up too badly, right? Because a lot of us love the convenience of texting, because we don't want to be put on the spot with a phone call, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So if you don't answer right away, that's what it's for, right? So don't

beat yourself up too much about not getting back to someone. 24 hours, I think, is a really great catchall for that. But also, we are expected to be on so many platforms all the time, right? Especially if your job is on the internet, like you and I, Travis.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: There's the Instagrams, there's the Facebooks, there's the Slack, there's all of these—

Travis: The hula hoops, and that funky music the kids love these days.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: What is it, ska, with all their trombones?

Teresa: [laughs] All of those things.

Travis: Their two-tone shoes. What are they doing over there, with those big suits?

Teresa: Where there might be direct messaging, there might be group chats, there might be all this kind of stuff, right? It's a lot. So—

Travis: This is, I think, the struggle to find the balance.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: For me, right? And I can't speak for all people with different— The myriad of neurodivergences, right? But for me, it's trying to find a balance between not beating myself up while still holding myself accountable.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? Because you don't wanna be like, "Yeah. I guess I'm just a person who doesn't respond to people." And it's like, well, no. That's not great. So what

you're saying is, the way that I respond to people is different from the way someone else might do it.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But I still need to make sure that I'm finding a method that works for *me*, to make sure I'm responding to people.

Teresa: 'Cause you wanna manage those responses, right?

Travis: Right. It's not just like, "Hey, it's my world, and you're just living in it." That's not how it works, right? You might be like, "Listen. I know that there are people out there who respond to everybody right away. I'm not that person, but I'm gonna do my best to make sure I get a response to somebody in a timely way."

I've told people like, "Listen. I'm sorry to say this, but sometimes, if there's not a question mark at the end of the text, I don't even think to respond to it."

Teresa: That makes total sense!

Travis: So if you need an answer, and you're not just telling me something, and you actually need an answer to something, if you can phrase it as a question, I'm way more likely to answer it right away.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: Than like— Because for example, in that circumstance of someone saying, "Okay. We'll see the movie at 8:00." And that seems, to me, to be the end of a conversation. But they wanted confirmation from me that 8 o'clock worked and that I'll be there.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And I wasn't even thinking that. So if they said, "Okay. So does 8:00 work for you?" or "So we'll do 8:00?"

Then I will write back, "Yes," right?

Teresa: That's great. That's a great way to let people know your hack or whatever, right?

Travis: Right. This is a Trav hack.

Teresa: Also—

Travis: Travis HackElroy.

Teresa: [through laughter] Travis HackElroy.
Also, phones come with like, do not disturbs, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And you can send a text, and you'll get that do not disturb mode, or quiet mode, or whatever it is. You can choose to send it through anyway, but they might not respond, right? Because if I've put on my phone that this is quiet time for me, I'm probably not gonna answer it.

Travis: You could also just get in the habit of what I do whenever my friend Alice texts me, where you just text back, "Who is this? How did you get this number?"

Teresa: [laughs] Also—

Travis: I have texted— By the way.

Teresa: What?

Travis: Alice is like my best friend, and we work together all the time, and she works with me. And she's like the right half of my brain, I guess? She's the person I hired to make sure that my ADHD doesn't get in the way of me being a functional adult business person.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And my phone now autocorrects her name to all caps.

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: If I type in Alice, I'll be like, "Yeah, I asked Alice about it." And it'll just cap "ALICE," all the time. And I'm like, how many times did I have to write her name in all caps before my phone was like, "I guess we're just always very insistent that Alice exists"?

Teresa: That's who she is. There's also a lot of great stuff on the phones now. There's speech to text.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: I often do that, because I need one hand for, I don't know, pushing Dotty on the swing or whatever. And so I have to do speech to text. There's also voice memos that you can send. My sibling Liz really loves those.

Travis: Gmail, where it's just like, here's a four-word auto response of "Yes, looks great."

Teresa: Yep. Yep.

Travis: I do those all the time.

Teresa: There are definitely ways around it. And if things are— If this is getting in the way of your relationships, there's lots of people that you can reach out to for help as well.

Travis: Okay. So that's gonna do it for us. We have more. There's more questions, but we're gonna have to save it for another *Ask Shmanners*. So if you have questions for us, you can email them to us.

We wanna say thank you to Alexx for going through these questions, and for going through all of our emails. We could not make this show without Alexx. We also wanna thank our editor, Rachel. We couldn't make this show without you.

And we wanna thank you for listening. We could make a show without you, but actually not this one. We actually couldn't make this one without you, because it was about the questions you sent in.

What else, Teresa? What else do we say?

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 today.

Please continue, once again, to send things in to us. We love it.
Shmannerscast@gmail.com. Say hi to Alexx, 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]

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