

Caller: *Hi, Esther. The context of my question is that around 10 years ago, my business partner and I established a company together. That company has grown and been successful across most of that last decade during which both of my brothers have joined and been promoted into leadership positions.*

Around three years ago, my relationship with my business partner deteriorated. We both had some personal issues which impacted our professional relationship. So I decided to take a step back. I've taken a non-executive role. I've explored some other really, really exciting opportunities. So whilst I retain directorship and a shareholding, I'm no longer involved in the day-to-day running of the business.

That arrangement worked really well. We had some teething problems, but the first year was pretty successful. But during the second year, the company has unfortunately started to fail. I believe we've had a good strategy, but the implementation's been poor and the relationships between my brothers and my business partner have also broken down at times.

We're in a position now where we hope to sell, but we may well have to close the business and make the team redundant, and that's a process I'm really struggling with. Some of that's about old stories in myself, so I feel very, very responsible for my family, for my team, for my clients, for my business partner. I feel ashamed that I haven't done my job well enough to keep the business thriving and successful, but I'm also struggling a lot with a lot of sadness and, and some feelings of anger because I feel like I've placed trust in people who I care about very deeply. Um, and I'm struggling with the fact that the business is now in the position it's in due to decisions and actions that they have taken.

So my real question is how can I best reframe my thinking to set up our relationships for the best, whatever the business outcome- my family because I love and care about them very deeply, and my business partner, because we'll continue to know each other in a professional context. Thank you.

Esther Perel: Anything you wanna add or clarify?

Caller: Yeah, the thing I thought, as soon as I sent that voice note off and I thought, oh, I've, I've ended by saying, I love my brothers so much and my business partner is this guy I'm gonna have to see forever, which doesn't do justice to our relationship. The fact that it's broken down now is really sad for me. I don't necessarily think it's recoverable, but he's still someone I really care about. So, there is that professional side of things, but there's definitely also a sort of personal sadness about that relationship.

I think since I sent the voice note and there's been one more call between the four of us, which was quite a difficult call. It's probably the most sort of visibly angry I've ever been about the situation. So possibly just even thinking about it in the context of our conversation has kind of helped me engage a little bit with my emotions around it. Other than that, the situation remains as it was.

Esther Perel: We can focus on you because you have a lot, a lot of feelings and a lot of thoughts about what has happened and that of course implies your relationship with each of these people. I think it's a good place to start, maybe because I will understand also your role with your co-founder, with your brothers, with the family. I seemed to have understood that there is something that you bring to the company that mirrors a kind of role that you have had in the family. There's a kind of a, a superposition between the role at home and the role at work. So can we start there? Does that sound good?

Caller: Sounds great.

Esther Perel: Okay.

Caller: Um, yeah, absolutely.

Esther Perel: So I'm gonna listen a little bit and just take in the story.

Caller: Of course. So, I'm the middle child and I'm the only girl with two brothers. Everything was very happy, I think. Sort of very happy childhood, all of those kinds of things. Fantastic parents, I love my brothers. I also really like my brothers. Um, I would say we are...

Esther Perel: As people?

Caller: As people, yeah. As people I would, I, I would be friends with them if I met them tomorrow. And...

Esther Perel: Are they friends with each other?

Caller: Almost all the time. Apart from work. That's, I, I think it's really the only thing that's, that's got in the way, certainly for the last 20 years, um, has been, has been work. Since we, since we all became grownups. We've all been good friends with each other in, in every combination. They are quite different people in, in some ways. In other ways, they've got probably similarities, which maybe at work without me in that dynamic, they found themselves clashing in ways that when we all work together weren't such an issue.

Esther Perel: But you feel a sense of responsibility?

Caller: Completely. Yeah.

Esther Perel: Tell me, tell me more.

Caller: Fundamentally. I think I, I think maybe it's on two levels. I think at work, essentially, the buck stops with me. I believe that I'm, I'm a director of the company. I'm an owner of the company. But fundamentally, what is my job if it's not to make sure the company is successful? If the buck doesn't stop with me, what is the point? So I think that's, that feels very, very true and that feels still true regardless of the fact that I've taken that operational step back. The difficulty now is I have far less control than I used to have. I don't feel less responsible, but there feels like far less I can do about anything which is hard.

Esther Perel: And is that a question that you have? The question being should I go back to a more hands-on role so that I can have what you call control is basically the resources, the means to actually execute on my responsibility.

Caller: Absolutely not. I would, I would, I, I wouldn't for my own sanity, uh, I would not go back. Over the last maybe three to four months, um, I have been doing a little bit more because it was necessary, but I, I would not go back on a day to day basis. I love my work life outside of this particular issue exactly as it is.

Esther Perel: So you have a combination of, I'm actually really fulfilled and excited by my new job or new career or new venture but I need to find a way to leave and to maybe close or sell in such a way that my new excitement doesn't screw up a bunch of other people.

Caller: Exactly that. And I think that's practical because I want to do the work that needs to be done with the company that we're talking about on a very practical level, but also emotionally, I feel so conflicted that 90% of my life is we're setting up a new company, we're doing this new thing, we have these new clients. And that's so exciting. And then I look back and I see my brothers and the team of the other company having a pretty awful time, and I just, uh, bringing the two together feels brutal so I find myself not talking about certain things. And, and not kind of sharing the good times and the excitement with them because it doesn't feel appropriate. But then, yeah, it feels like a huge conflict.

Esther Perel: Conflict or betrayal?

Caller: Oof, betrayal. Yeah, that's a good word. Yeah.

Esther Perel: I mean that, that you seem to say, I feel like I'm betraying them by having such a good time somewhere else while their ship is sinking.

Caller: Yes, exactly that.

Esther Perel: And but at the same time, I'm pissed at them that the ship is sinking because it shouldn't be sinking because we were doing really well and basically they mismanaged? They, they took bad decisions or they're not as good as me, or what, what is it?

Caller: Yeah, I'm, I'm angry and I can't say that to them because I know they are working so hard and have never not worked hard. But I'm really annoyed because I feel like I sat there in, we, we meet monthly as a board, which I sit on and I sat there month after month saying, guys, look at the numbers. We have a problem, we have a problem, we have a problem. And I heard month after month, next month we'll be fine. It's, it's short. It's temporary. It's short term. It's short term. So I feel like it is not that none of us saw this coming. We talked about it and I allowed myself to be put off and put off and put off until we find ourselves where we're at now. I even, before our most recent set of meetings, I went back and I read or listened to all of the notes from all of the meetings for the last year because I thought, am I going mad? Did I not say any of these things? Is this genuinely a surprise to them? And, and it's, it's just there and it's infuriating.

Esther Perel: And what did they, how was, how did they react when you reminded them?

Caller: Throughout the process, they would say, oh sure, but that was last month. This month is different. Now we've reached the point where we're at, where it's, it's undeniable where we are. I think there's a huge emotional understanding that they all have of it. I think they get it but it's difficult because what does getting it practically do? I suppose we'll feel probably like we don't have time to, to process the emotional impact of it because we're so busy trying to bail water outta the ship that we just have to.

Esther Perel: But it may not be that you let them kind of deflect. It may also be that while you saw the problem growing, you thought, I don't wanna have to jump in to fix it.

Caller: Yes, that's, that's probably true. I really did not jump in to fix it.

Esther Perel: Right. So you let them, you let it, you let them say what they said, even though you noticed, even you pointed at it, even though you told them. But then in order for them to recognize, it would've meant for you to become more involved again. And is there a story about why you stepped out?

Caller: There is. There's two sides to it. So one is there were other really exciting things happening and offers I was getting to go and, and set up other things and I was really excited about those and they weren't things that could be combined with the role that I was previously doing. So that door was definitely open at a point when I was actually probably a bit bored of the sort of work that that company does. So it was, it was a good moment for me to, to look at those. There is on, on the sort of more negative side of the piece there is the fact that, yeah, my, my relationship with my business partner had, having been a really strong business relationship and I would say a really strong friendship had started to break down, essentially. It wasn't a good relationship for either of us. That, that was about three years ago.

Esther Perel: Why? I mean, why does a relationship that is so good and strong for seven years suddenly decline?

Caller: Yeah, I think so. We, it's, it's all personal things really. I went through a divorce and he went through a very major breakup at almost exactly the same time. So whilst when basically we'd been able to previously compensate for each other, I think if, if someone had a crisis or, or a personal issue, the other could step in at that time neither of us really could, and we probably both felt that deficit.

And then, from my perspective, I'm sure he would want to say similar, but from my perspective, I felt some of his behavior during that period towards me was just unacceptable. He would, you know, he would, he would call me for two or three hours a day not very sober. Tell me everything that was wrong with the world and with me. And, um, that's fine for a while, but it went on for months and I started to find that really, really difficult. And sort of an imposition on, on, on my life, really. It was really tough and our relationship, we, afterwards we weren't really able to talk about it, and I don't think the relationship recovered really.

Esther Perel: Have you, have you tried since, I mean, are you polite? Are you just, uh...

Caller: Um, yeah, we're, we're polite. I think we meet in person and we're friendly. I think ever since he's gone through that experience, I experience him as quite a different person. He'll do things like if we're having a meeting online

and the tone goes in a way he doesn't like, or the topic turns to something he doesn't like, he will just leave the meeting and not talk to any of us for the rest of the day, for example. So it's quite difficult to engage on difficult topics. We're a fully remote workplace as well, so we don't go and sit in the office together. So, we, we've tried, we've, we've gone out for drinks together and, and, and we are friendly and professional when we meet in person. But starting that conversation has proved really difficult.

Esther Perel: And, and what would he say if I asked him what led to the deterioration of your relationship, of this friendship, of this partnership?

Caller: I think he would acknowledge the bad behavior. He doesn't typically have a problem saying, yes, I behaved badly. I just think he's doesn't necessarily feel particularly guilty or like he needs to change when he behaves badly. I think he would acknowledge that. I think he would say, and he would be 99% right? He would say, you know, she got tempted off by the new shiny thing. She was bored of the work that we were doing together. She just left us. And I left over the course of a year. I didn't walk out suddenly, but I, you know, I think he would say that she, she, she got bored, she got tempted, she left. It's fine.

Esther Perel: So that's the main reason she left. She didn't leave because our relationship deteriorated.

Caller: I think he would understand it that way. Yeah.

Esther Perel: Yeah. And it's not, there's truth to it.

Caller: There, there is absolutely truth to it. I, I would, I would say it's about 50 50 personally.

Esther Perel: So if I hear you well, there's something in your request that is, how do I do what I want and not feel guilty about the effect that what my wanting has on others?

Caller: Yeah. Yep. That's, that's, um, that's pretty accurate.

Esther Perel: Right? I mean, company nevertheless, but basically if the company went well, then you would feel less guilty. And you would just say, I went to do what I care about now, but I left them in a good situation and they're thriving. And so, you know, I don't feel that bad because they're doing well. But

now that this, this is not happening so smoothly, I sit with this duality that I wanna do what I want and that's not new. And I wanna be liked.

Caller: Yeah. Oh, I, I'm. Yes, I, I like being liked.

Esther Perel: Yes, of course. So do I, by the way. It's not such an unusual thing. But it's very difficult to wanna do what you want on a regular basis and to still hope that people will continue to like you.

Caller: Yeah.

Esther Perel: You know, usually it's like two different realities may need to coexist. You may wanna do what you wanna do, and other people are entitled to their reactions. You're entitled to do that and so are they. And those two things can coexist. So rather than wanting the other people to accept why you chose what you chose as if it has no effect on them.

Caller: That makes sense. I think I, I felt absolutely, like I say, we had some teething problems, but they were normal, I think, for the scale of transition that we were making in that first year. But until the business started to have its current problems, I felt no guilt because I thought this is a win, win, win. You know, I, I get to do what I want to do. And everyone else gets to run the company how they want to run the company. We are set up, we are successful. It's a small company. It's always scrappy, it's always risk taking but fundamentally, we're set up for success. We have a track record of success. I felt no guilt at all. And now I feel really guilty because I get to keep doing what I want to do and, and they don't.

Esther Perel: So since I don't think this is the first time you have this conflict in life, I would say, how have you dealt with it at other times? What have been ways that you have been able to integrate this tension?

Caller: Yeah. The example that springs to my mind first, which is completely in my personal life, but it's probably when I did get divorced. My ex-husband didn't want to. I did. And I never joined this equivalence before at all but it makes complete sense. And, essentially I was like, well, you can't stay married without me. So off I go.

Esther Perel: And your ex-husband had similar thoughts and feelings as your co-founder? Even though totally different reality.

Caller: I think my ex-husband was just really confused.

Esther Perel: Blindsided.

Caller: I think. Yeah, yeah, exactly. And likewise, I think would acknowledge that there were ways in which he behaved badly, but would say, you know, fundamentally you went off to find something new, didn't you?

Esther Perel: Yes. You were bored and you went to the next shiny thing.

Caller: Same. Yeah, exactly the same. Yeah. Um, so how did I, I suppose, how did I navigate that? Firstly, the next shiny thing is really good, so you can lose yourself in that. That's probably not the, not the healthiest mechanism in the world, but, but fundamentally going off to do that new, shiny things are great. But otherwise, I suppose I sort of, I sort of looked at it as a, again, it's a slightly dramatic way to put it, but it's like you're sort of like born alone and you die alone and fundamentally, sometimes you have to make the decisions that are right for you and you cannot carry everyone else's weight.

Esther Perel: Did you feel bad for hurting him?

Caller: Yes.

Esther Perel: Okay.

Caller: Yes, of course. I felt horrible.

Esther Perel: It's okay. You know, those two can coexist too. I am going to leave. I've made up my mind. I don't wanna be here. And I feel really bad about hurting you, leaving you, in some sense betraying you. And again, I hope you will be well because if you are well it lessens the guilt, the burden, the responsibility. But it's an important thing to be able to continue to have empathy and awareness of the reactions that people have about your decisions while at the same time making your decisions. What sometimes happens is that in the, in the name of wanting to do what we want we cut ourselves off of how it affects others so that we can maintain our oomph. So we can stay the course and proceed with the decision as if, if we actually looked to the side for a moment and saw what effect it has on others, we won't have the guts or the strength or the confidence to actually pull through with it.

Caller: Yeah, I can completely see it. I'm quite good at once a, once the, once the decision's made, as in both cases, so when my husband and I broke up and with the business now about thinking about going in back into that, to that day to day, I can just tell that, that both are just an absolute no for me.

I think because I don't get sort of tempted back to revisit my decision and that kind of thing, I hope I am able to sort of look those other emotions in the face and go, okay, I'm gonna do this anyway. But I still have all of this, this awareness. I suppose, the difficulty I think that I'm facing now, and the difference with those scenarios is I, I see my ex-husband at two weddings and a christening every year and not the rest of the time, whereas I have to be so careful in this position because this is my whole family. Um, if I don't get this right, it's my whole family.

Esther Perel: Right, right. So that's, that's the stakes this time is that you can't have a leaving that basically has these people exit your life. This, this leaving is a partial leaving and your brothers stay in your life. Your co-founder is maybe a different story. So what's the conversation between you and your brothers?

Caller: Um, I think there was a real breaking point, turning point rather, about three months ago, something like that, where I think we'd always spoken in terms of, you know, how can we save the business? What can we do to change things? In a way we'd sort of never really allowed for the idea of failure. We'd not really discussed it and we were able to have a meeting between the four of us, as I say about three months ago, where we just said, look, this is the position that we're in and we have to talk about it in these terms now, because if not, what we are going to do is enormously let down our clients and our team by heading to, into a catastrophe which is unplanned. We have to plan for it. That was a really good conversation.

Esther Perel: Who led it?

Caller: I did the pivot because I essentially said, look, I can't do this. If we can't look this truth in the face, I can't have this conversation anymore. And once we turned that corner, everyone engaged fantastically in that conversation.

Esther Perel: But this is what you said. And where were they?

Caller: One of my brothers had found it really, really difficult to consider the possibility previously. He would very explicitly say, look, I can't think about failure, because if I think about that, then I, I will just, you know, fall off a cliff. I cannot be in the mindset for that. So I just can't look at it. That's where he was. And then, my other brother who's maybe, I dunno, a little bit more of a sort of, he likes, he likes to look a problem in the face as a guard against it. He takes that approach. So maybe he's considered a bit more negative about it. Uh, so I think he found it a sort of easier transition to go through. So they came from two quite different places, but I think we are now more aligned than we have been for a year between the three of us at least.

Esther Perel: It's interesting that when you have a, kind of, a family business, you name the people by their family tie. My brothers. My brother one. My brother two. If you were not a family business, you would be saying my operation person, my finance person, my marketing person. They would be identified by their role, not just by their family tie. Would that change it for you?

Caller: Um, yes. Because I think if I used that language, I would find it easier, probably, both inwardly and outwardly to hold them to account in a professional way. Whereas probably what I've done is not held them to account sufficiently in that way and therefore we find ourselves in a worse position than we would've been. But I think by, by keeping it too personal, I probably haven't done the best professional job I could do.

Esther Perel: You have known that or this is new insight? I, I tend to agree with you.

Caller: I've thought before that I should have done a better job around accountability. It's, it's one of the things that I feel embarrassed about, ashamed about. I've never linked it to the, the language before. That's a really new insight for me and that makes total sense.

Esther Perel: I mean, the language defines, emphasizes the relationship and we have a different relational expectation and business actually, we have a different business expectation because of the nature of the relationship. And if you constantly emphasize the family tie, and the loyalty, and the middle child, and the desire to have your brother stay in good terms with you, there's a good chance that that will influence expectations around accountability.

Caller: I definitely, uh, I think I would two, two sentences. So if I say, oh my, my brother's working really hard. They're just not performing the role so well at the moment, for example. I find it very easy to let them off the hook. Whereas I would never, in, in one of my other companies, I would never say, oh, my marketing director's working really hard so even though it's not working, it's okay. I would, I would never say that, that sounds crazy to me, but I would absolutely, and, and have done it the other way around. The intention is good and the work is hard, but the quality's not there sometimes. Makes no sense without the familial tie.

Esther Perel: I mean, this is not said so that you can take a hammer and start banging on yourself. Right? Don't turn insight into instant criticism.

Caller: No, I, no, and I understand that that is a tendency I definitely have. I will try not to.

Esther Perel: It's hard to sit with. It's like, whoa, you know, because that's not what I would've done but it, it's very good food for thought and it's a lot of good information for the future because I'm assuming you're trying to think how they could continue with you in the next venture.

Caller: Definitely not the next one.

Esther Perel: But you feel like you need to help them find the next place to land?

Caller: I feel absolutely I would continue to have professional relationships with them and work with them. Definitely. I don't want to work in the same way again, because right now, the stakes feel so high. In a way, I recognize, as extremely patronizing, I think, oh, it's my responsibility to make sure that they both land on their feet and get the right jobs.

Esther Perel: Why? Why? Why do you? Because the, the more you tell me that it implies... And that's a subtle thing, that you actually don't think they're capable. And therefore you need to boost them in one way or another, or lessen your expectations or not demand the same level of accountability and now I need to understand that a) you don't really...And I dunno if it's a they or one more than the other, or it's a package deal. Is there a message you were given that you need to...?

Caller: I don't think...

Esther Perel: That you're not allowed to succeed beyond them by yourself and that this has to be a triad?

Caller: No, no, definitely not. I think I'm, I was at a younger age, the most academically successful one. One of my brothers is, is now definitely in advance of me on that, but sort of age for age equivalence. And that was celebrated by everyone, including them which was fantastic, I think I tried to get to the bottom of it. And I, I think it's, it's difficult for me because I know it's. You know, I, I just said, you know, it feels really patronizing when I look it in the face. I, I think, I don't, they're both adult men who are incredibly capable, competent, clever, hardworking human beings. They do not need me to solve their problems. They absolutely don't.

Esther Perel: Do you really believe that? Because the patronizing part of you doesn't believe that?

Caller: I think it's probably doesn't predate working together. I think working together in this business, when I, when I set the business up, I'd been working in this sector for a while. They were both new to both the sector and to sort of start up life and all of those things. And I'd done all of those things. And so I think when they first joined, we probably ended up in this position of not I know everything, but I know more than you. I know more about the sector, I know more about the company. I know more about how to do this and therefore, you know, so it's my job to, to be that sort of guide. And then we've had that period where actually, you know, it's fantastic and they've both got specialisms I have no idea about. And I love that. But I probably just have never left behind that whole like, hey, you know, newbies, I want to make sure you have a fantastic experience here and, and you grow and you learn all that you want to. And that's my job, which maybe seven years ago it was my job. It's not my job now and they don't need me to do it. They really don't. I, I think it's, I think it's, that probably. Probably doesn't predate our professional lives.

Esther Perel: Are the parents involved in this story?

Caller: They are probably to the extent that. Um, they're, they're very good. Whenever any of us talk to 'em about work, the others never hear what they say. So they're, they're pretty, uh, they're, they're good sort of secret keepers. They're not gossipy, which is perfect. Um, I find it currently very difficult to speak with them about the situation, not because I don't trust them, but because it feels too difficult to, it feels like I would end up blaming or being very embarrassed or,,,

Esther Perel: But difficult means I worried that I would either be blaming my brothers or blaming myself?

Caller: Yeah, exactly that.

Esther Perel: It's either anger or shame.

Caller: Yeah. Yeah. I, I find it very difficult to talk about this entire situation without one of those things. Unless I'm in complete professional, let's get things done mode. I have no middle ground right now.

Esther Perel: I get it. And you came to me for the underground.

Caller: Yes.

Esther Perel: Not for the middle ground.

Caller: Exactly.

Esther Perel: Because you see what happens is you have a particular situation and all these reactions and feelings and behaviors come up. But then when you look at them, you begin to notice how they reflect similar behaviors that are very similar in completely different situations. It's like you get a bit of a, a Rorschach of your coping strategies, of your style of dealing with these kind of situations. Something I try to do where I depend on other people, I typically am not somebody who so easily depends on other people. I go out myself. And if it doesn't work, then I'm stuck between the what they did wrong versus what I did wrong or vice versa. I did wrong and I blame myself. Suddenly it gets decontextualized and it becomes highly personalized and it's no longer about startup world and this and that. It's about them, mostly my brothers and my co-founder or me. One of us sunk the ship.

Caller: Yeah.

Esther Perel: You know? And it's not about responsibility as much as about blame.

Caller: It feels like that now. Yeah.

Esther Perel: Okay. But that is not the only time you've done it this way. When you come with such a set structure, usually I think, you know, this is part of your own relationship resume. This form has already existed in other situations as well. It also accompanies people who live with a very strong sense of responsibility and personalize. If it goes well, it's me, but if it doesn't go well, it's also me. There are other people when if it goes well, it's me, and when it doesn't go well, it's others. You know?

Caller: Yeah.

Esther Perel: So we can do the same as you did with the divorce. What do you recognize in the somebody must be at fault and I vacillate back and forth. Sometimes I think it's me and what I didn't do and how, and then I went back to listen just to make sure that I really had warned them, the signs are out there, the company is not performing well. But, part of me feels that if I had really taken this seriously, I should have gone back to fix it. But I didn't want to. And so I saw them and they didn't do it either. And here we are.

Caller: Yeah. Yeah. I really didn't want to, um...

Esther Perel: I am very clear on that.

Caller: Um, I.

Esther Perel: But it's very important piece because that really didn't really want to, is like I rang the alarm but I didn't rang it that intensely because I knew that if I really followed the thread, it will land with, I have to step back in here 'cause there's something I know that can actually fix this or, so I think.

Caller: Yeah.

Esther Perel: But I didn't wanna do it, so I thought let them do it. But part of me knew they can't do it.

Caller: Yeah. A lot of what you've just said really, really resonates. The, the, the, the piece about helping. No, I, I like, I like to help people. I don't like to get, I don't, I don't like to get help. I like to be independent. Um, I like, I like all of those things. And for me, it's, it's part of the same, it's part of the same story.

I suppose, it sounds really self-aggrandizing, but I look back and I think there are very few things that I couldn't make right that if I tried hard enough and I brought my energy to, to bear, there are few, um, and yeah, I might be about to have the first one, but, you know, sort of few major failures that I've gone through. And realistically my sense is it's probably cumulative. So, I've gone, okay, we had this issue and I've been able to fix that through working insanely hard or whatever. And we've had this issue and I've been able to solve this and this issue, and I've been able to solve this. And probably what I have ended up with is an enormously swollen head about the kind of problems that are personally solvable by me. Um, and actually life was always going to run me up against something which, which wasn't personally solvable by me. In our case, market conditions have changed and those, those external factors are true. Um, they're absolutely true. There came a point during a previous meeting where I just said, look, I don't want to hear about the market again. What a stupid thing to say on reflection. Of course, we have to think about the market. But, I'm trying to think where, where does it come from? Kind of like, what's the oldest story I can think of? Um...

Esther Perel: Or not that old. Shall I give you a clue?

Caller: Please.

Esther Perel: I have no idea if it's a good one, but it's the one that popped into, into my head. I think I could fix this problem, but I don't want to. And so I get mad at you for not being capable to do so. And you're not being able to do so then puts me in a position where I feel guilty, bad, that I am not doing something that I know I could do because I don't want to. And so I enter into a tension between what I should and what I want. Why can't you do the thing that I don't want to do? If you did it, I would be fine, but if you don't, then that the wanting gets into conflict with the should.

Caller: I, I fear we may be back on my poor ex-husband again. Uh, for, for that, because that.

Esther Perel: You may need to go and have a, a closure conversation with your...

Caller: And, and an apology to him. I, yeah, no, indeed. Um, I, I think it's a,

Esther Perel: And tell it to me if you can, with insight and not with a bat. You're harsh, you're hard on yourself. Which is part of what prevents you from thinking sometimes. And from having the awareness and the insight. Because when you do it so instantly morphs into criticism and a bat that you just don't wanna do it. You don't want to continue the thought. So I know something just clicked. Let's just explore it together.

Caller: I probably realized that I didn't want to be married really early. Um...

Esther Perel: To him?

Caller: To him, to him. And once I got through a period of...

Esther Perel: What is really early, by the way?

Caller: Within the first year.

Esther Perel: Okay. It's not uncommon.

Caller: So after I'd sort of worked up the courage to look that in the face, which I'm very glad I did, on, on the note of, of not being too harsh with myself, I think that was, it was, I did it quite quickly. It felt quite brave. But then I had that, something really resonated in what you said of that kind of, if only you could do this, then I could realize that I do want to be married and then all of our

problems will be solved that you aren't aware exist yet. You know, if, if, if only, if only you could be this or you could do this, uh, or you could...

Esther Perel: What kind of this...Gimme a couple of examples of....

Caller: Uh, there was some stuff around his drinking, for example, which I didn't love, but was realistically well within the kind of, you know, sort of realms of toleration. There were just, and again, quite early, just things that annoyed me. Just sort of bits of snobbishness and pomposity, which realistically we'd been together for years by then. I should have worked it out earlier or I, I felt like I should have worked it out earlier, so I felt very guilty about sort of setting these, um. You know, he, he must have been really confused because suddenly things that he'd been doing for years I could not live with anymore.

Esther Perel: Get it.

Caller: And I would say, you know, just, you know, if you could just do this, and I would feel awful about asking because I knew it was unreasonable and I knew it was absolutely about me and not about him. I'd changed. He hadn't changed.

Esther Perel: But I was picking.

Caller: Yeah.

Esther Perel: But I was picking. Right? Everything became source of irritation.

Caller: Exactly, because fundamentally I wanted out and I'd had the bravery to look that in the face, and I hadn't had the bravery to, to do it. And again, trying to be, kind to myself, I also think I, part of that was about compassion and thinking now I have to, I have to try. I think at the same time I was picking, I was also trying to do better and, and to be better, but, um, we, we went to one session of marriage counseling and the therapist said in the session she was like, there is basically no point in you being here because you do not want to be in this marriage. She was more professional about it than that, but, but fundamentally she said, look, there's not much of a conversation to have here, and that was you. The penny sort of clicked for me and I thought, you know what? That's true and it's actually not kind of me. To keep doing this. This is not a good life for him. This is not a good life for me. I'm not being kind here. We just have to move on, which we did very quickly after that.

Esther Perel: So the conversation that I imagine needs to happen with your brothers is not about the company and not about the market. It's a conversation

about the family ties. And it may be with both of them at the same time. Or if you don't call them as brothers, then you probably will have them one-on-one. If they were named by their role, you wouldn't bundle them.

Caller: Yeah.

Esther Perel: But in this instance, it is a family tie conversation as much as a company conversation, but the company conversation you have, it's really the family tie. I realize this is challenging for you, what have you been thinking? Where do you see yourself go from here? Is there something that about our relationship that is affected by the company changes? Either we sell or we need to close. And it's a relationship conversation.

Caller: As we've been speaking now, I've, I've just realized, I don't think I've ever said to them explicitly what I said in my very first question in the voice note to you, which is just, I, I want to come out of this as we'll always love each other. I want to come out of this as, as good friends as we are now, and that's not to say that there won't be emotional responses. Of course there will. I appreciate it might be a really bumpy time, but fundamentally, my biggest priority is to, to come out of this with these relationships intact from all of us being able to, to do that. And I, I think I've never said that, that explicitly to them, it feels like maybe a start.

Esther Perel: Yes. Yes. Very much so. Very. Do you think they even think that they know that or they think you're selfish?

Caller: I hope they know that. I think that may coexist with thinking I'm selfish. That's, and that's, that's fine. I hope they know.

Esther Perel: You have a great place to start. You have a great place to start. You matter to me dearly. Companies come and go. You are my brothers for life. And, we are gonna go through a difficult transition. What do we need to do as brothers and sisters for us to come through this? So it's not just an I, it's a we. How do we stay together? We maintain our bond. We each have our own feelings about what we're going through. We don't have to be in unison. This is not a choir. But at the same time we have a, we have a unified goal, which is to maintain, do we have this unified goal? It's definitely mine. And what do we need for that? What do each of us need? Because you may have needs from them too. It's not just them from you. I'm sorry. You may have to actually ask for something.

Caller: Don't make me. No, I....

Esther Perel: I just did.

Caller: I love. No, I, I I love that as a, I love that as a question. I love that as an introduction. That doesn't feel like, um...

Esther Perel: It's not scary.

Caller: That feels easy. Yeah. It doesn't feel scary.

Esther Perel: It's not scary. It's, it's what it's exactly. And the fact that you instantly connected it to the voice question is perfect. It's the dots that needed to be connected. 'cause you're not going to talk about failure. You're going to talk about the persistence and the perseverance of the bond that exists between the three of you. That's the most important piece.

Caller: It's the most important thing.

Esther Perel: And then that's the most important thing actually, what they each will do or how they see themselves. You know, go from here. And the fact that it's not just a failure either, all three. Is that a good place for you to pick up?

Caller: Yeah. That's a great place. That's a, that's a great next step. Thank you so, so much.

Esther Perel: My pleasure. Bye-bye.

Caller: Thanks. Bye-bye.

Jesse (Producer): This was an Esther Calling, a one-time intervention phone call recorded remotely from two points somewhere in the world. If you have a question you'd like to explore with Esther, could be answered in a 40 or a 50 minute phone call, send her a voice message, and Esther might just call you. Send your question to producer@estherperel.com.

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