

Voiceover: What you are about to hear is a classic session of *How's Work? with Esther Perel*. *How's Work?* is a one-time unscripted counseling session focused on work for the purposes of maintaining confidentiality names, employers and other identifiable characteristics have been removed, but their voices and their stories are real.

Esther Perel: For so long relationships in the workplace were considered soft skills, highly idealized in principle, but then disregarded in reality. And a major shift is taking place in the workplace now where relational intelligence is on the forefront. It is not the soft skills, it's the hard skills.

So in my work studying relationships in the workplace, I found that there were four pillars that are foundational: trust, belonging, recognition, and collective resilience. With trust I mean, do you have my back? Can I rely on you? Can I disagree with you without having to face the consequences? Are you here for me? Trust. Belonging. Am I a part of the system? Am I taken into account even when I'm not here? Am I seen? Recognition is am I valued? Are my contributions valued. And collective resilience, which I think is really the significant one, especially for this episode, is when there is a crisis, can we come together and tap into the social resources, the collective resources here to help us deal with this crisis rather than to fracture and fragment, which often happens in crisis situations.

So this is an episode that I did during the pandemic with an entire newsroom. I've never forgotten it. I never forgot it because I remember always the sentence that the editor in chief, when he said, I'm running this whole newsroom and I have never met anyone in person. And at that time, that was like inconceivable. People were kind of trapped into their little homes. They were parenting at the same time, all their roles had collapsed in one place. They were straddling multiple roles all at the same time. And when I listened to this episode, again, I was instantly projected back into COVID era. But so many of the things that we are talking about today when we discuss relationships in the workplace, how they affect culture, how they affect performance, it was right there. So let's listen.

Newsroom Member: It's an understatement to say that this is the hardest year that our newsroom has had.

Esther Perel: I'm not meeting co-founders or colleagues for this session. For this session, I chose to meet an entire team, in fact, an entire newsroom of 70 or so people. They've asked me to come and do a session with them because they have felt that dealing with breaking news has broken them.

Speaker 5: We all just cover like terrible, traumatic, sad things all the time, whatever the daily horrors are.

Newsroom Member: We are always on. And that's true for any newsroom. People care about their jobs and they are on 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Esther Perel: Journalists, during this COVID year, have been essential workers of their own kind. They are front line workers themselves. They're interacting with the visceral experience of people.

Newsroom Member: Like you can't, you can't turn away from the thing that is stressful and upsetting because it's your job to be turned toward it.

Speaker 5: There's like no escape. I wrote an obit for the woman who ran the front desk at my gym, who died.

Esther Perel: And they don't even have the possibility of getting the support from each other that they typically have when they are in the newsroom.

Newsroom Member: I mean, such a big part of being a journalist, I feel like, are those moments of walking across the newsroom and striking up conversations.

Speaker 5: That's how ideas start, you hear someone do a phone interview and you go, like, "Wait, I actually know someone who also does that." The collaboration is so much harder to do when we're all so far away. And then also just the fact that like we've had a big change in leadership. We had layoffs. And so, we just lost a lot of staff, and yet we've had more work than ever before because of the nature of our jobs.

Newsroom Member: We are going through a huge racial reckoning. We have lost so many women of color through layoffs and also through them just not wanting to be here anymore.

Esther Perel: A newsroom that's in a state of grief, that has experienced tremendous losses over the past year, a newsroom that has experienced a state of collective trauma and that is exhausted. They are participants of the very stories that they are witnessing.

Speaker 5: So, friends, I'm so excited today to introduce psychotherapist Esther Perel, a best-selling author of multiple books on relationships and sexuality. And so, therefore you might be thinking, "Why do we have the world's most famous sex therapist chatting with our newsroom?" And that's because her latest podcast, *How's Work?*, is focused on work and work relationships. And with this year of hell, we thought we could have her come and talk to the newsroom about the impact of crisis on the workplace. And while anyone who has engaged with her work at all knows that Esther will make you rethink your whole life and every relationship you've had, she did wanna make clear that she won't be so bold as to claim that she can fix anyone or solve anything in one

session. She makes no promises of quick fixes, unfortunately. And so with that, if you're all muted, can you please give me a show hands, or clapping, and welcome Esther Perel.

Esther Perel: Thank you, thank you. And hi, everybody. Um, so let me ask you just very, very briefly, you're all in your homes, I imagine, but broadly you said, okay, there's this conversation, it's a therapist, she's gonna talk about what's happened to us individually and to the newsroom in this time. Give me just a few things so I have a gut check from you. Anybody.

Speaker 6: Um, I'll be the sacrificial victim, just to prime the pump. The, the thing that I was thinking the most of is the sense of isolation that's accompanied all of this. It's been many months now, and although I normally work out of San Francisco, and so I'm already at a remove from the people in New York, the um... it's been significantly worse. I've felt much, much more isolated from my colleagues since, since this has all began, and I'm really struggling with that.

Esther Perel: Can you say one more thing about it, because it's such a theme, it's not just your experience alone, you're talking, you know, h- anybody who's gonna say something here is gonna be talking for many people. Everyone's individual experience is part of a collective experience. So, so, the isolation, what about it? Specifically, what aspect of it?

Speaker 6: Well, in part it makes it harder to do my job, which involves coordinating work products, how they flow from person to person as they move, um, so it just makes my job harder. But it also has made my life much harder, it's just hard for me not to interact with people all day. And, I have noticed that it asks a lot more of my partner, as a consequence of that, because she's the only person that I see most days. So where I would have seen a lot more people, in my small office, on the day to day basis, I don't anymore, and all of a sudden there's just one person who's asked to bear all of the, uh, weight of my in-person interactions.

Esther Perel: Right.

Speaker 6: And I struggle with that. And she struggles with that, and it's, it's hard.

Esther Perel: Yep. Yep. Can I just ask you all just to raise your hand in case that resonates? Okay, just so you get a, a sense as well. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I'm just gonna listen for a minute before I say more, but yes, who else?

Speaker 7: I would love to add to that. Um, and just like a slightly different version of that experience, which is that I live by myself and I know there are others here as well who live by themselves. Um, I think our version of that might be that most of our kind of interaction comes very intensely from work now, in a way that it didn't before, and that at least for me personally has made me feel

very intensely about everything that happens at work and every interaction that I have. It's just, is like, there's so much more weight attached to it.

Esther Perel: Yeah. Let me hear a couple more.

Speaker 8: Um, I would, I would throw in that it feels like because there's so much happening in the world, and my desk is in my bedroom, like next to my bed, and I feel like I am often like scrolling through Twitter until midnight even though I don't have to, and then like, thinking about work so much of the time, that it's easy to get burnt out even when you're not actually working. Um, and it feels like a self control thing, like I could just decide to save it for work, but it's hard when work and life bleed together so much.

Esther Perel: So, um, the context in which this conversation takes place. I think that we are not working from home, we are working with home. And that's very different. There has never been such a strong collapse of the boundaries between all our roles where we are the worker, the boss, the parent, the teacher, the tutor, the partner, the cook, the cleaner, all of it. And I've probably missed a few. You know, um, at the same time. Without anything that usually is called contextual living. We are highly localized, generally. We work in one place, we go to eat in other places, we exercise in the third one, we go see friends in the fourth one, there is time and space in between that that delineates and demarcates between these various activities, and it is intensely organizing for us to dress differently for different places, to go to different places, to have a beginning and an end in that place, to move back to the next one, to have a space called commute or travel or something in between.

This collapse of the boundaries is intensely psychologically taxing. And then, to turn the home into a gym and a restaurant and an office and a, and a laundromat, and everything else as well, so that you know, what you describe about you know, I'm already lying there and I'm on Twitter, and I'm in bed and the bed is next to the desk and, and you know, we've never been psychically apart and we've never been more intimately involved in each other's private spaces.

I mean, people are literally entering bedrooms when they've never even been in other people's homes, you know. Um, and how do we counter that, has everything with do with creating routines and rituals and boundaries. You know, it's like a tiny gesture to make sure that, you know, you clean the table on which you have worked so that it becomes a dining room table, but it actually is intensely important to create these demarcations between activity and between state of being and state of mind. So, that's the first thing that I was gonna highlight with

you actually, is this, um, the, the on the one hand, the request to become more flexible and more open and more understanding of who we are as people, but

on the other hand also a real need to strengthen the structure that usually comes as part of the way we live, and that this time we must deliberately do ourselves. You know, um, that's the first thing.

There's a few things for me also that have stood out with this. One is the living with a sense of prolonged uncertainty. We have been in this constant, you know like a total pandemic hum. And this sense of prolonged uncertainty is gnawing at people, in a real constant way. Even when we allow ourselves the positive aspects of the quarantine, you know, the slowing down, some of us the opportunity to reconnect with some parts of ourselves or with others or with our families, there is this thing underneath and we tend to call it stress. But it is much more multi dimensional. You know, if you break it into parts and you start to give it names, it's called sadness, confusion, irritability, despair, hopelessness, loneliness, that's stress. It needs to be named. Unfortunately when we just call it stress, we tend to also highly physicalize it and just look at it as a physiological response, we tend to medicalize it, look at it as symptoms, and most and foremost we tend to see the answer to stress through a prism of self-care. And self-care which you have heard plenty of in the newsroom, I'm not gonna tell you more about self-care, because everyone hears about mindfulness about meditation and all of that all the time, when in fact, much of the self-care that is needed in a time of collective experiences is tapping into the resources of other people.

With the prolonged uncertainty comes something, and I've just kind of tried to create a vocabulary for the, for this period what is often called ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss is a term that was created by Pauline Boss way back when to talk about situations of unresolved mourning. So for example, you have a parent, or a family member that have Alzheimer's. They are still physically present, but they are psychologically gone. Or you have people who have disappeared. They are still psychologically present, but they are physically gone. Miscarriages are ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss is what we are experiencing right now for a world that is still somewhat physically present but doesn't resemble itself.

And you can't fully mourn it, but you know that there is a sense of mourning that is taking place. You know that there is a sense of collective grief over the world, of the world that you knew, over the plans that you had made, over the weddings that got canceled, the birthdays that didn't get celebrated, the anniversaries that were not even looked at. It's all of those tiny losses. Connected with that sense of collective grief, but grief over deadness, not just over the actual physical death, that we all know. But the deadness that is creeping up inside of us, the isolation that you're talking about, it's more than just isolation. It's connected to what I call the loss of eros.

But not eros in the sexual sense, eros as in the life force, the curiosity, the

mystery, the playfulness, the imagination, the spontaneity, the exploration, that side of life that is on the other side of security and stability that is everything that has to do with reaching out, has suddenly become so tinged with danger that we live with the loss of eros. If it's dangerous to be curious because curiosity takes you outside of yourself, the only trips you're allowed to take at the moment are the trips inside of yourself, and yes, everybody who has lived in real confinement for a long time knows that freedom under confinement comes through your imagination. Anybody in jail has known it, anybody in a hospital has known it, any child knows it, because a child can turn around 360 and suddenly be the new sheriff. Because they have the capacity through their imagination to switch the borders of reality like that.

So, we, we don't go on a walk, we imagine ourselves going on a walk with somebody. We're each on our own phone, but we're having this walk, and slowly we begin to believe that which our imagination's creating for us. So that's, we have prolonged uncertainty, ambiguous loss, collective grief, and then with that, I think that one of the concepts that is also been very, very useful in, in dealing with this whole period, and when I think of this period, I think of COVID as an environmental disaster linked to the, to the storms, linked to the fires, linked to the election, linked to the economic upheaval and linked to the social unrest, and linked to what it means when these devices that we have for decades now said are making us completely disconnected, have remained the one and only main way to stay connected. So we are really dealing with stuff that is very hard to process when you're in the middle of dealing with it.

But one of the terms that for me has been really useful, because its, its existed the, the test of time, is the notion of tragic optimism. You know, tragic optimism is the opposite of what we tend to do here often in the US especially that kind of believes in mastery, you know, which is, we either go back to the old normal, we go back to the old ways, no we're back to n- to, to anything yet, and we don't know we will go back to. But tragic optimism is the ability to maintain hope and to find meaning despite the pain, the loss, and the suffering. And that for me means that when you say that you're isolated, when you have a meeting, that you don't just plunge into, you know, what are the stories that you're gonna write, or whether you're gonna sign to whom and what, but that you actually take a moment to check in with each other, and ask each other a slew of questions that have to do with who you are and how you're living now and what you're facing now, rather than just pretend that this is business as usual and you need to continue work, produce, perform, and perfect.

And these questions may be basic questions, you know, are you taking care of anybody at this moment that is more than the usual care you typically do? How many of you are sending portions of your salaries to other people than yourself? Who is taking care of you? What are some of the vulnerabilities that you have grappled with? You know, have you been able to go outside and meet

people in 3D, for distant walk, whatever? Um, have you lost certain people? And, if you, how have you lost them? What has been the loneliness for those of you who are alone? Do you, do you have a plant that you can grow, do you have a pet that you can touch, how many of you are suffering from touch hunger at this moment? A total famine, we are, we can live without sex but we can't live without touch. We've become desperate, angry, and, uh, and irritable. I mean it's just, you know, so what are we doing with touch when we spend that much time alone? And, and to have all those things part of your conversations, will actually help strengthen the emotional health and the relational health and the sense of trust, and the sense of, of, um, of accountability amongst each other. So, this is some of the things that I've been thinking about as I came to the meeting today.

What's very important for me to convey to this newsroom is to counter the pervasive notion of trauma from an individualistic perspective, i.e. you're having a problem with this, you're having challenges, issues, rather than pandemics, disasters, major upheavals in society create consequences of grief, of confusion, of loss, of distrust, of fear, and that those are normal, they're part and parcel of large-scale psycho-social disasters, they're not your individual challenge, and that collective traumas need collective healing.

Let me just ask you, give me a tiny bit of a [inaudible 00:20:12] check response of what you hear, what strikes you, what irks you, all of it. Yes?

Speaker 8: I, I was gonna say something about the trying to do routines. I've found it much harder, but, but in pre-COVID I was very routine oriented, um, and now I find that I, like, really struggle to keep them for like maybe a week, and then something will happen and it completely falls apart and I feel like I sink even further than I was before trying to institute these routines in my life, so, I don't know if you have any advice for, for that.

Esther Perel: [inaudible] routines?

Speaker 8: Uh, like just maybe doing something, um, in the middle of the day, like when I start working I kinda go into a work hole and like five hours will pass and I'm still on my computer and I won't move for a long time. [laughing] So, that's something that I've tried to institute which I just can't seem to keep consistent.

Esther Perel: Are you, are you solo, do you have people in your orbit?

Speaker 8: I'm solo.

Esther Perel: And do you have people outside in your orbit, that are not too far away?

Speaker 8: Not really, uh, I just moved like six weeks ago, so, um, moving, yeah. [laughing]

Esther Perel: I will, I will simply say this. Um, its very, very hard to be completely alone and disciplined about some of these routines in general and maybe you were good in the past, but in this moment I think that one of the most important ways to create any routines or any changes is to be accountable to others. It's not to do it alone. You know, if somebody shows up at your door, or if you only have a call that you need to make because you've made a date with someone that we're taking a 20 minute break and we're going outside. You will go outside. I, I, I've done a few of these things from the beginning and they, what I can say is they become cohesive forces. They become not just routines, they become ways that are part of a new structure of your life. So whichever your routines are if it has to do with exercise, if it has to do with taking a a break to eat, if it has to do with going outdoors, if it has to do with taking a moment to, to close all the devices for 10 minutes, plan with somebody else who shows up with you, on your team, among your friends, doesn't have to be related to work at all.

You find two or three people who have the same need as you, and the same complaint as you. And the most important thing is that you do the most you can in motion. We have never, never been that sedentary as we have had to be these last months. It is sedentary and in front of a screen, and in front of a screen in which I'm looking at you now, and I think I'm making eye contact but I know damn well that I'm not. There are no mirror neurons converging. And so, my brain is constantly aching to make an effort to make me feel like I'm taking you in and you're taking me in and we are actually connecting. And so I am putting out an enormous amount of energy to create that interpersonal energy between us, and we succeeding in some way, but at the end of the day I am exhausted.

And you are all too. And so, when the body moves while you do that, you can do it while you're on the phone or even if you look at the screen while you walk, you, you are creating a very different physiology and with that physiology, energy, state of mind and et cetera, et cetera. So those are my micro changes on this one.

Newsroom Member: Um, if I can jump in a little but, um, I, I, you know, it really resonated with me what you said about the, you know, the loss of eros which you defined as kind of the loss of, you know, adventure, curiosity, spontaneity, because I think that that's, that's actually I think especially hard for, for us journalists, because part of our, our work is going out into the world, talking to people, you know, often times traveling, and I feel like I've really felt the loss of that really hard this year. Um, it just, it just feels like this, this sort of weird lost

year almost, where, even though so many momentous things happened, like, all of my day has kind of looked the same. I guess like, I almost feel kind of a sense of, like, anger at this time sort of just, being such a, a strange, empty time. It does make you kind of question the value, even the value of your work, right, it's like, oh, what am I really doing, like, how am I really contributing. And so I don't really know exactly what my question is, just sort of like, how to, how to kind of come to terms with that.

Esther Perel: So, I think that first of all, the anger is part of the grief, and the grief is part of the experience this collective loss that I'm talking about. It's not just like, this anger is, is, very much part of that acute stress that is in, in this grief thing. What you have as journalists, I mean, I think journalists, psychotherapists, we are a type of essential worker. Different from this narrow definition that has been given, but we are and you are, and people need you in order to even know what's going on in the world they're living in. But what you have as a journalist is that you even more than a therapist, because we have a few people that we remain curious about for a long time, you have your curiosity dispersed on a daily basis in front of new people.

You thrive on the encounter with the stranger. Some of you. Every one of you has different beats here, but you know, this pandemic fundamentally changes the relationship to the stranger. This stranger who now becomes an element of danger, to which you can be danger to as well. And so that is a, an amazing loss of eros. Happenstance. Serendipity. Chance encounters, which you have in a newsroom, you are one of those places where you walk around, you hear somebody on the phone, and you say, oh, I know about this, I can connect you with that. You d- this is an enormously enlivening essential dimension of a newsroom is that happenstance, chance, non-planned thing that you stumble upon like that.

And when you live without that dimension, you mourn. And sometimes, it's important to create little rituals together, um, as a team when you meet. You know, that bring that back. So that you create little ex- experiences of surprise, of unknown, of whatever, could be recipe sharing. And it's a channel for, for creating new things, inventing something, stumbling upon something that you didn't know. Now, when you add it like that, what, what does that have to do with, you know, big issues, but these small things remind you that life is actually lived in the details. The stories may be about big topics, but like you know, you're into the unique details that make that story compelling, and it's those small things. So, it's the same when you create rituals with each other, but yes, at this moment, you have more than many, but you have lost more than you like of that dimension.

Newsroom Member: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: Yes?

Newsroom Member: I guess, um, I think also just, um, kind of being in these sort of kind of like flight or flight mode all the time, uh, we had the initial shock of it happening, and then we had sort of a, a sense of doom about like our industry, and then we had lay offs, um, and then we had the election, which also brought a sense of doom, and so, I, I found myself often just kind of feeling like I'm in a, in that, in a bunker, uh, like, in, and then kind of realizing occasionally, like wait, this is, this is not a fight or flight moment right now, you know, but, but feeling like my, my sense of what is and what isn't is kind of, uh, been screwed with a bit. If that makes.

Esther Perel: Yes. Because when you have danger, and you basically activate the more primitive brain. It takes a while to realize that the lion is gone. You're going to spend time at first in a state of hyper vigilance, or hyper alertness, and it takes a while to realize, no no no, I can come out, you know, nobody comes out of the bunker just running. You come out of the bunker, whatever the bunker metaphor is, it's a beauti- it's just a, the literal sense of it, you know, and you just make sure, is it safe, is it okay, can I go. And then slowly, slowly, slowly, you know, liberation just takes you, you know, and in other situations you just walk in the daze for a while. You stay calm, quiet, different temperaments here, and you just realize, oh my god, and then slowly, slowly your shoulders open upon and d- go down, and your neck straightens again, and you start to breathe deeper, that's the first thing you notice, is that, you, you, you, you no longer in the shallow breath of, you know, that is the vigilant breath, you know, you let it go down.

But, because we are in the prolonged uncertainty, you can't completely relax, because it ain't over. It ain't over, and, it's not just the pandemic, it's your job security, it's your sense of what is the relationship, you know, between management and between journalists and reporters, you know, what is stable here, you know, you've gone through, it, you know, it's not easy to have a new chief in the middle of this. There's a lot of things that talk to, you know, the challenges to a system, to an organization, and the resilience of the organization to be able to deal with every one of these steps.

These are difficult in and of itself, so imagine that at that moment, but what's very interesting is because you are, you know, you wouldn't be there, all of you, if you're not high achieving people. High achieving people tend to not really do this to themselves very often. We did this, well okay. On occasion, we aced it, you know, and on to the next challenge. Generally, you know, you are very, very good at analyzing cracks. You're less equipped sometimes at looking at the light that shines through the cracks.

Newsroom Member: Uh, yes, so, I guess I'm shaking my head yes because, um,

what you said felt very true, like analyzing the cracks seems more of a reflex to me than not, or noticing where there aren't cracks. [laughing] And the thing I've been struggling with the most, um, uh, is trying to understand like, how do I feel, um, proud of myself, or how do I feel satisfied with myself in this environment. And, um, I guess like part of my story, I guess, um [laughing] which everyone here has heard about in great detail, um, is that I'm a, I'm a parent of two young kids, um, I had a baby in December, it's been very hard, and, you know, I frankly feel like I am failing at everything. I mean, I truly don't use that as a turn of phrase or anything, it's a very deep seated feeling like, um, you know, work is hard, and parenting is hard, and trying to be a good partner is hard, and I don't feel like any of them are getting the attention they deserve, and um, I feel like you know, sometimes when I say this, people think that what I want is like external validation, or that like maybe I'm fishing for compliments somehow. But that's not it, it's like really right now lacking a sense of, um, achievement or something. And on a daily basis, like not knowing when anything that you decide is really the right decision.

Esther Perel: As it is. If you happen to live in a nuclear family with one partner and two children, to put it really bluntly, it is a fucked up arrangement. It's the least co- effective that was ever created. Two adults for two little smurfs, and a full time job for each. [laughing] You're, looking at your reactions, but, you know, um, and if there is a time where that construct, that arrangement needs to be blasted, it is now. So if it's not gonna be your parents, you're gonna look around, and you're gonna think parts, this word that has come up in these last few months, is a real, beautiful image of interdependence. It's others who are going through similar challenges as you, because one other adult in the house or close by, or another child, is gonna change the dynamic of a family. And generally for the better.

And if you are alone, it's about moving in with one or two other people. If you are not alone but you are close to other people, it's about sharing food, so that you don't have to eat the same leftovers three days in a row. But you can eat somebody else's leftovers, that will make for you a very new dish. It's really thinking in ways that is not natural to the dominant culture of the United States. But it is natural to many people in the United States. You know, in this moment there are to me, kind of three essential experiences of the, of relationships, there is the people who are 24/7 together and just kind of, you know, gasping for air. There is the people who are alone, and longing for connection and touch, and then there are the people who are alone even though there are people right around them because they no longer connect to those people. Think that that kind of covers the main relational feelings in the moment.

So, this is a moment where you choose your people. And you find around you from the, another family that, that, where they, where their child goes to school with your child, and you create a canopy around and you begin to deal with the

next three months differently. It's like, the loss of the resources that you would have relied on doesn't prevent you from creatively thinking about other resources. It won't be perfect. But you cannot do what you're doing, as you're doing, without having the feelings that you have. The feelings that you have are exactly the feelings one would expect you to have at this moment, given that you have just simply too many demands and a certain sense of wanting to do them well, well doesn't mean alone. This I say looking at you, but I think that pieces of this may apply to many, many of you. Yes? I'm listening.

Speaker 5: How, how do I find myself to care about my job at a time when like the world is collapsing, and I'm like, you know what, what if I just get stoned and watch TV instead?

Esther Perel: Okay. Disasters, and crises function as accelerators. They function as accelerators in relationships and they function as accelerators to people and they function as accelerators in terms of our priorities. And maybe the things that you're caring about at this moment, they have carried you, they have nurtured you, they bring you joy, they bring a smile to you. And, they help you deal with the big issues that are taking place in the world. You know, what you're asking is, am I less committed and in my work as a journalist if this is not the one thing and be all that's at the center of me all the time. Artists deal with that all the time. Am I a painter when I'm not painting? Am I an actor if I'm not performing? How much do I have to do it in order to be it? And how much do I have to do it in order to think that I am really it? That's the identity question. In, all in all, you may not have produced any less, you just feel inside like you're coasting a little bit, or like you're thinking about other things and this is not the only thing. I think that this is totally normal. And if, and, and, and, and, and if there is a baby in the house, there are times when one is also not thinking about it with the same degree of uh, of uh, of enthusiasm or focus.

Newsroom Member: You mentioned, um, the changes at work and how much more they kind of hit because of our current situation. Um, and, I, I, it has, for everybody in this newsroom, I think, um, friends, colleagues, have been let go, um, our bargaining committee has been going back and forth with the company over a lot of things that we care very passionately about, and there's discord there, and um, we had a big reckoning company's, uh, diversity issues over the summer. There's been a lot, and when we're all in newsroom, like that human connection that we have, like seeing leadership every day and having those little interactions, like that helps rebuild trust and helps, you know, rebuild morale and, and in some ways, like, we're, we're, remind us that, yeah, people are complicated, but when in this situation, it's like, you have to take agency, there's no bumping into somebody and exchanging a few words. There can be, you know, and especially if you're hurt, you don't, you're not in a position to reach out, like, why would you want to, you wanna lick your wounds and, and heal by yourself.

But I'm, I'm wondering, like, how, when we all go back to the office, if we do, what's that's gonna be like, and even worse, how do we maintain these bonds that are so normal when we're all in the newsroom together, that like, the, the comraderies, the, you know, just how we feel about our colleagues and our work, how, how do we maintain that or rebuild that, um, in these time?

Esther Perel: So, can I ask you something for ex- yes, somebody was gonna say something?

Speaker 4: I just to say, that's a very important question for me too, because I started in the time of Zoom meetings. Since I've been editor in chief, I've never once been able to walk through the newsroom. I've never once been able to see somebody in a hall, and just have a quick conversation, there's not a single time that I speak to somebody that is spontaneous, and that's true for every single person in this newsroom and has been true since March. We've not once had a spontaneous meeting. Every meeting is a phone call, or a Zoom call.

[silence]

Esther Perel: I'm staying quiet because I want you all to take that in. This is a collective experience. This is a moment where you're united, in a shared experience, in shared reality. Regardless or despite of the bargaining differences that may have been. And the other reason I wanna stay quiet for a moment is because this is not a thing you just have a solution to. The most important solution to things that we experience around acute stress or loss is the ability to sit with it together and to experience empathic resonance.

Now, may I ask you if you have ever had any meetings outside, socially distant, for work? One, two, too few, three, now okay. So, the research on, on, on screen and relationships is this. They're done it on couples who live long distance. Is that if you actually sit together like we're doing now, and we're just, it, it, it's fine, but it's quite exhausting. Whereas, if we were both doing stuff in parallel play, like it when people play in parallel, and I'm cooking, you're cooking, or I'm at my desk working and you're at your desk working but I see you like people used to be in the library, that that actually is a lot better for fostering the connection and not feeling this kind of frozen state. You can create slightly office mentalities by have your screens open so that you can write, and then you lift your head and say, you know, I'm gonna take a 10 minute break, you wanna take a 10 minute break too, and then we come back.

Break the walls, basically. And it is of course your imagination who will do it, but it is very interesting experiment. For you as the editor, you have got to find ways to meet your people, um, part of this for me, is I, I think it's because we still think that this is a temporary thing that's going to go back to something. You know, I don't that, what we're going back to, honestly I don't know. What I know is that

we want hybrid. Everywhere people are researching what people want vis-a-vis work, they want more hybrid. There is something about not commuting as long for some people that people have liked. But, I also think that it depends what kind of place one lives in. Many of us don't live in a place where it's comfortable so coming to the office is actually a much bigger space than anything we live in. And there is light, and there is food for some of us, which is not always something we have at home, at in ample amounts, et cetera, et cetera.

So, the workplace is a great equalizer. The workplace is not just the place where you come to work, it has massive psychological meanings, you know. A newsroom is probably one of the tightest places where people come together, and therefore the more risky one. But people can create news hubs outdoors in the meantime, as long as we don't freeze our fingers and people can type something away. And, and, and have meetings like, where you come to discuss how we're doing, you know, everything that has to do with the need to bump into people, right, the serendipity, the mentorship, the negotiation, the licking the wounds, all of those elements, can be done in person. I, I just think that we should not become too rigid about those tiny boxes.

An organization that goes through massive transitions faces the question of what are the things that we want to hold on to? And what are the things that we want to let go of? Where do we see an opportunity to bring in something different and better? And this is the opportunity that comes with big transitions. As it's happening to this newsroom, it's also happening to our society at large. All disasters bring re prioritization. We ask ourselves, what must be rebuilt, and what must we build anew?

Voiceover: You just heard a classic session of *How's Work? With Esther Perel*. We're part of the *Vox Media Podcast Network*, in partnership with *New York Magazine* and *The Cut*. To apply with your partner for a session on the podcast, for the transcript or show notes on each episode, or to sign up for Esther's monthly newsletter, go to estherperel.com.

Esther Perel is the author of *Mating in Captivity* and *The State of Affairs*. She also created a game of stories called *Where Should We Begin*. For details go to her website Estherperel.com