

Today's episode is absolutely worth your time. I talked with one of the leading relationship experts about all kinds of stuff that you probably want to know like what drives infidelity, what happens if someone cheats, when do you call an attorney, when do you call a therapist, what's going on in people's heads, what's going on with modern relationships, what's changed. We don't talk so much about relationships [00:00:30] as being part of what makes us high-performers as human beings and we go really deep in this episode. It's just packed with useful information for you so listen through all the way to the end and you'll like what you hear. You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey.

Today's cool fact of the day is that scientist are now using virtual reality to reduce phantom pain in paraplegics. A Swiss neuroscientist published this new research that shows when paraplegics can't [00:01:00] feel their body, they feel pain similar to phantom limb syndrome. Just allowing them to see with virtual reality their body reduces the pain and it can do it actually permanently. What they could do is just provoke an illusion that the legs were being lightly tapped when the person is actually being tapped on their back above where their spinal cord was damaged. What they're doing there is just reconnecting parts of nervous system, they're saying if I've got no connection it's pain and by remapping these things that are entirely outside of their conscious awareness, they're permanently changing brain mappings and reducing pain.

What this means for you is that there are lots of things going on in your nervous system that you have no knowledge or awareness of but if these guys can hack these in this extreme cases, there's probably stuff going on in there that you can also hack. Before we get into today's show, If you haven't had a chance to try Bulletproof ice cream. You totally have to check this out. You can make it with brain octane oil or XCT oil and this is something that I give to my kids for breakfast. I like to take the Bulletproof chocolate powder and do it as well. You can do with vanilla, and it has no sugar in it. What it has is lots of raw egg yolks which might sound gross but the juditional recipe for ice cream is raw egg yolks and cream.

In this case, using butter and brain octane because butter had different effects on your body than cream. It is the most delicious [00:02:30] creamy, amazing dessert and it's actually called Get Some ice cream because I discovered this when I was working on creating, doing fertility and my wife, Dr. Lana. She was infertile when I met her and we put together a program that was the basis of my first book that restore her fertility so we can have two kids at age 39 and 42. Part of this was her eating ice cream every night. We call it Get Some ice cream because it has everything in it that your body wants to have in order to have healthy kids. You eat it, an hour later the signal came in from the environment around you that says, "You know what? I got everything I need to make a healthy baby. Let's go try."

I guarantee you this stuff can work better than vodka if that's your goal and it's delicious, creamy, amazing, and it's got tons of the right kinds of fats for you. The recipe is on the website, just head to [bulletproof.com](http://bulletproof.com). You can get your

brain octane oil and you can pick up the other ingredients like the chocolate and the recipe is on [bulletproof.com](http://bulletproof.com) as well.

All right. Today's guest is Esther Perel. She's a sex and relationship therapist who has appeared on Oprah, and she's got 20 million views on her TED Talks. She's a best selling author, New York Times best selling author actually of a book called, "The State of Affairs: Rethinking Infidelity."

She was also just the featured speaker at the Bulletproof Conference a couple of weeks ago which was amazing, the audience just loved it. The reason that Esther came to the Bulletproof Conference, I met her at a group called Summit Series several years ago where she gave this amazing talk. It was just people overflowing from it about relationships and about just looking at them really, really clearly. I got to know her, spent some time there and it was like, "Wow, she know some things about relationships." As you know from listening to the show for a while, there's three big behaviors that are driven by the mitochondria in our body, there's run away from or kill scary things, eat everything, and have sex with everything else. Esther is on the show because she can tell you about having sex with everything else. Esther, that's an introduction you've never had before.

Esther Perel: Indeed.

Dave Asprey: Welcome to the show.

Esther Perel: My pleasure.

Dave Asprey: Now, you regularly just captivate audiences when you talk about what's really going on in relationships and what's changed and all this, but I think people listening would love to know how did you get started as a relationship therapist, is this because you had bad relationships? What motivated you to start studying all the things that you study?

Esther Perel: I've been interested in psychology and human behavior and human relations probably since I was a teenager. I actually don't think I had relationship problems, I hated my teachers. I didn't like school and I thought there must be a better way to deal with young people. Then, I just began reading a lot. I went to university. I studied psychology. I studied primarily educational psychology and then I studied various kinds of therapies and how to use the arts, particularly psychodrama and music therapy. When I came to the states, I discovered systemic therapy, general systems theory which probably underlines a lot of the things that you do as well and the notion that relationships occur in the context that families are systems, that relationships are systems.

They have structures, boundaries, hierarchies, coalitions, they have growth curves, et cetera and I became fascinated with systemic thinking about relationships personal and professional. At that time there was very little

couples' therapy and it was kind of you work with the family and then as you dealt with the problems around the children usually you realize that sometimes something was going on in the couple as well. Over time, since the couple has become the central unit of a family today so did the field of couples therapy and so for the last 34 years I have been primarily a couples' therapist working with individuals and families as well but a couples' therapist. Romantic couples, family relations, co-founders, team members, and I love the diet of the couple.

Dave Asprey: It's awesome the way you just think of everything as a system and the fact that you can do relationship counseling with a start-up team even though it's a different kind of relationship. I think it's awesome because my experience has been that, that for sure if you have poor relationships at home, you'll have them in the office, you have poor relationships in the office you probably have them at home. Maybe different problems but the problems can be there. Something about your work led you also though to write specifically about affairs which I think has captivated everyone's attention. You argue that affairs can teach you about relationships so if your partner has an affair or you have an affair, what are you actually going to learn from that?

Esther Perel: You know, it's like we know that we don't learn only from studying Google or Apple. We learn from looking at crisis and looking at a breakdown of the relationship. Betrayal, distressed, breaches, help us understand what it takes to experience repair, resilience. When I say what we learn from affairs is that it is a huge crisis in the relationship. It is one of the most important crisis these days in modern couples. It is one of the leading causes of divorce, it's hugely painful and from there, you really get a sense as to what does it take to define boundaries, what does it take to heal trust once it is broken.

How do you recommit and what is the nature of commitment today, how do you reconnect erotically so that you don't just survive but you actually come back to life as a couple and you experience a sense of vitality in your relationship. There are systems that don't die and then there are systems that thrive and that's not the same. I just chose one crisis. I could have chosen other crisis but this one is so acute today, it has so many new meanings. I thought it really encompasses the entire human drama.

Dave Asprey: Is there any time there's an affair or cheating in a relationship you're dealing with the F word, forgiveness, or you're either going to end the relationship or you're going to decide to forgive the person? How often do you find that people go down the forgiveness and rebuild the relationship path versus just like, "It's over, you betrayed my trust. I'm not going to let that go."

Esther Perel: Look, on the one hand we know that this is one of the leading causes of divorce and we know that infidelity is often a break of the relationship but we also know that it can be a remake of the relationship. The ones who break usually go to the lawyers. The ones who remake come to therapist. In my office, in all therapist offices I would say the vast majority of people we see are people who try to rebuild. That doesn't mean they forgive sometimes, by the way, they learn to

accept, they learn to integrate this event, this crisis into the larger history of their relationship. They had 22 years before, they may have another 25 after.

This does not become the central event that defines the entire marriage or relationship. I would say we have a biased view as therapist because we see more of those who are looking to rebuild. Then the question is, what does rebuilding look like, what kind of outcomes can we look for in people who choose to stay together. Then sometimes forgiveness is partial and then sometimes people need to forgive themselves. It's not just that you want your partner to forgive you but some people live with their own perennial guilt over their actions. Forgiveness, acceptance, integration is part of one cluster.

Dave Asprey: What do people cheat in the first place? I think everyone listening either they have cheated or been cheated on or neither one but have it in the back of their mind, what drives that behavior?

Esther Perel: The interesting thing of course is that once you ask the questions why do people cheat, you've already framed the whole experience. Cheating is something that you do to somebody else but that is not necessarily what it means for what you're doing for yourself. This experience of infidelity is a dual perspective. It's always what it did to you but it's also what it meant for me. Why people stray? First of all, the meanings and the motives for doing it are multiple. "I'm resentful, you've neglected me, you've been having an affair with your job for the past 12 years, I could not get your attention on anything, you have rejected me sexually for years, I am lonely, I feel numb, I feel beleaguered by responsibility.

The last time I ever did something that was just for me I can't remember, I have been taking care of everybody, I don't remember who I am, I long for a different version of myself," those are the kind of more negative reason. The reasons that have to do with the relationship. Then, often these are love stories. People fall in love with somebody else, people fall in love with a different version of themselves, people reconnect with lost parts of themselves, and those reasons have very little to do with the relationship itself. This is done by people in good relationships, in lousy relationships, in open relationships

All relationships are susceptible to the experience of infidelity actually. Often, by people who are not chronic philanderers, that's a group. A lot of the ones we see in our office I would say the vast majority it's often people who have been faithful and committed partners and loyal partners for decades. For that matter, partners who often continue to be loyal at the same time as they are massively unfaithful.

Dave Asprey: What does that mean to be a loyal and unfaithful at the same time?

Esther Perel: It means that my commitment to our relationship, to our family, to our children, to your alcoholic brother, to your mother who's in the nursing home,

to our community, to our finances, to our home, I continue to be committed and to deliver on all of those expectations of me. I still show up every night, I still take care of the house that was destroyed by the floods at your father's house, and at the same time, I also have sometimes another relationship. It's this very complex multilayered story that goes on. People often have very stereotypic ideas. I'm loyal, I'll give you the best example of loyal.

We know right away that with longevity since this is part of what you deal with, an enormous amount of infidelity actually takes place in people over 60. Many of these people have often spouses or partners who are ill, sometimes who don't even remember their names. They visit them all the time in the nursing homes. They have never left their relationship and at the same time they have sought the comfort of somebody else. That's an example of I'm loyal to my partner till the day they die. I will be there at the nursing home or at the hospital, all the time and I also have sought tenderness, love, connection, touch with somebody else.

Dave Asprey: That's a very different scenario than some of the other ones.

Esther Perel: That's the scenarios that we don't think about, right.

Dave Asprey: That's pretty arguable that that's even a healthy behavior although it's going to create a lot of emotional stuff in all the people around you. Now, I remember-

Esther Perel: You know what? I hear so many people because I've now been for a month on tour here and people tell me the truth when they come to sign the book. The number of times I've heard that story, my mother was sick for years, my father was sick for years, I know my father remarried, my mother remarried, I think she already knew that person before but she stayed loyal to my father to the last day. I thought it was one of the best things that could happen for him or for her to have another ...

The children understand it, the children who are themselves often in their 40s and 50s and what it says is this is so complex and ubiquitous, an experience that we really need not a model that's one size fits all and we need something that captures the complexities of life rather than the way we just often go black and white and massively judgmental. This is not to justify anything but it helps us understand when you ask me why do people cheat, this is part of the range of reasons why people do it.

Dave Asprey: That does open a definition of what is cheating, what is not cheating. How was this going to change? I've been pretty public about the fact that I think it's very reasonable for me to live to at least a 180 years. Yesterday, I was recording a podcast with Peter Diamandis and he's like, "Oh yeah, my number is 700." What's going to happen in relationships as we are able to be more like 50 year olds when we're a 100 or 150? Do you see big shifts in the way loyalty in relationships happen?

Esther Perel: Do you know where the highest rates of growth of HIV is happening at this moment?

Dave Asprey: No.

Esther Perel: In nursing homes.

Dave Asprey: Wow.

Esther Perel: That is CDC fact.

Dave Asprey: I had no idea.

Esther Perel: Okay?

Dave Asprey: It's happening.

Esther Perel: Everybody knows that 60 is the new 40 and that when people say, "Is this it?" When they have a crisis of meaning in their life for example and they say, "Am I going to live like this for another 25 to 30 years?" As they are 50 or 60 years old saying that, that is a concept that would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. That notion, a 100 years ago, we die 6 years after we were done raising our children and that was an average of 47. Today, you arrive at the end of a certain cycle and then you say, "What's next?" You project yourself into a whole different sense of future and you want to still feel that something new is going to happen in your life.

You don't want to feel like it's just going to be the same for another few decades and you want to either reinvent yourself or regenerate in certain way or pass on what knowledge you had accumulated and that's called the generative experience for the people that come after you. You want to continue to feel relevant and that will enter not just in your romantic relationship. It will enter in the choices you make for what you do, for how you stay. You know, you're not just going to want to play bingo. You going to want to still do socially relevant things.

Dave Asprey: Do you foresee people remaining faithful for a 100 years to one partner?

Esther Perel: People right now are living a life of serial monogamy. They are doing it for years before they have their long-term committed relationship or their marriage. They've had quite a few relationships before. We marry an average of ten years later in the West today. Then we may stay married with somebody for 20, 30, maybe 40 years and then we start again, either because of death or because of divorce but this continues by definition at this particular moment we have shifted the definition of monogamy that used to be one person for life to one person at a time. People will tell you that they are monogamous in all their relationships but they will have had three or four before they married and

maybe two or three in the context of marriage. Another way is because of infidelity but simply because of longevity.

Dave Asprey: Currently, what is the incidence of cheating? What percentage of couples have infidelity in their relationship at least once?

Esther Perel: Look, we have no idea. First of all, because there's no universally agreed upon definition of what even constitutes an infidelity. In the past, it was very clear, you had sex, you got pregnant, you had a baby, and the color of hair of that baby did not resemble yours, the markers are very clear. Today, what are we talking about? Is it a love affair? Is it a chat room? Is it a massage with happy ending? Is it prostitution? Is it pornography? Is it staying secretly active on your dating apps? Where do we draw the lines is one of the big discussions today. We know that the definition keeps on expanding and we know that it's never been easier to cheat and it's never been harder to keep a secret.

That said, the numbers go between 30 and 70 depending on how you define it, but we don't learn much from asking have you had sex with somebody other than your partner in the last 12 months or what does sex mean and since Clinton came to the forefront, that definition has been revised a few times. What are we talking about? People lie, men will post and they would exaggerate and women will hide and deny because there are still nine countries where women can be killed just for straying. Women have always hidden their sexual lives and men have always pretended they had sexual lives they didn't have and that does not change when you ask the questions around infidelity.

I think what's more interesting is that if I ask an audience from 400 to 4,000, how many of you have been affected by the experience of infidelity in your lives as the children of parents who were unfaithful or fell in love with someone else, or left the family to be with a new partner, as the friend whose shoulder is wet because somebody's been weeping on it as the confidant, as the three main protagonist, you name it. About 80% of the people will raise their hands.

Dave Asprey: Wow.

Esther Perel: That is not just a husband and a wife or two men or two women, this is the affairs are systemic and they are intergenerational. They have accompanied marriage from the day marriage was invented. There have been transgressions. In history, men were not unfaithful, they were just being men, that's what they were called. Women were unfaithful.

Dave Asprey: When Clinton, when everything came out about what Clinton did, he opened up some conversations around like you said, What infidelity is. When talked to like leadership in France, they would just laugh and say, "Really? The president of a country had a mistress? We don't care, why are you so worried about it?" What are the differences you see in different cultures around acceptance of this both for men and women? Are there places where it's normal for women to have

affairs and it's not as secret as it used to be? Are there places where it's expected and normal? Where does the U.S. fall in the spectrum there?

Esther Perel: No, I think that it is a taboo everywhere.

Dave Asprey: For women.

Esther Perel: It is not normal, for men and women today. Today, it's for men and women. The part of romantic love has actually made it monogamy, exclusivity, fidelity is a dual mandate of conviction for both partners be to a straight couple or a gay couple. The difference is that and Americans by the way don't cheat an iota less than the French. Just so we are very clear on this.

Dave Asprey: Okay.

Esther Perel: The experience here is framed much more in moral terms rather than in relational terms, meaning, in France, it hurts. It isn't necessarily thought of as it's wrong. It happens. People expect this to be something that is part of adult life. They don't want it, they don't hope for it by far and they are no less hurt by it than anybody else here. Americans have this whole notion that the French which I am not by the way, it's very important to reiterate that this is normal and that everybody has it. The big difference between French infidelity actually and American infidelity is that in France it's much more often a long-term relationship.

Dave Asprey: Okay, that's a big difference there.

Esther Perel: That's not nearly the kind of thing here where people are constantly trying to make it look like it means nothing and I was drunken, I was just in a bar and I was at the hotel and it means nothing, it means nothing. The French don't go around telling you the whole time it means nothing. It's long relationships that accompany and that exist outside of the marriage. The big difference is that traditional cultures that are more collective oriented and don't see the marriage as only being between two individuals but see a marriage as being between two families have always compromised around infidelity in order to prevent divorce, in order to keep the family together.

In the more individualistic societies like the United States, if you have betrayed me, it deserves breaking up the entire system with all the dissolution of the family, with all the bounds and the connections that are going to be severed. That is where the outcome is different. The Clinton thing, what it highlighted was that in the United States you can divorce multiple times and people barely blink an eye. In other countries, that is seen as outrageous. Preserving the family is the primary value and here, preserving the individual is the primary value. That's the fundamental shift and there's not a better or a not better, these are different emphasis in the society and in the culture.

Dave Asprey: I've seen huge shifts. I work with a lot of people under 30 and so many of them have tried polyamory or dating multiple people at the same time, the numbers are showing that people are getting married much later. People under 30, they're just not getting married like they would have even ten years ago. Is fear of infidelity part of that or just saying well, it's going to happen so let's just build it in? What's going on with that because it seems like a really big societal shift that hasn't happened maybe since the 60s?

Esther Perel: I don't think polyamory has much to do with fear of infidelity. In the 60s, when people were flirting with the notions of consensual non-monogamy, the notion was the rejection of the bourgeois model of marriage. The meaning of consensual non-monogamy today is very different. People today want long-term relationships that still carry all the values of the traditional marriage, companionship, economic support, family life, social respectability, and they want a romantic marriage which is the one person for everything, best friend, passionate lover, confidant.

They want the self-actualization marriage which is the value of authenticity and truth to the self. It's those two values that bring in the notions of polyamory meaning I want a committed, stable, secure relationship but I don't want it at the expense of my personal freedom and self-expression and authentic self. That authentic self for some people includes a sexual self-expression. That's where the notion comes in, it's not done to avoid infidelity. There is a notion that it may avoid infidelity and ultimately what it will do is maybe make the relationship last longer because we both will experience a sense of self-actualization inside our relationship and therefore it will be a stronger couple.

That's the goal, the goal is to last, to be stronger, and to not compromise the self in the context of a connection. In between, the idea then will be if we do this with honesty, truthfulness, and transparency, we may also be able to avoid the secrecy, the lying and the deception that come with all the transgressions of infidelity.

Dave Asprey: I have a few friends who are, I'll call them successful polyamorous but they're few and far between. Most of the people that I know who try this who tend to be younger tend to be highly anxious like they're experiencing a lot of emotional pain working through all the various things that there isn't a roadmap for. Do you think this is a fad that's going to go away or is this a change in relationships that's likely to stick around?

Esther Perel: You know for me when I try to understand consensual non-monogamy today, I think, what must people have been thinking 60 years ago when we were supposed to be virgin? This is the conversation about virginity 60 years later. What did we think about people who had sex before marriage? God, they were labeled in every way possible, and gay people for god's sake they were an aberration altogether. The life of a young gay person today and 60 years ago has nothing in common. When I go around and I try to write an article about creative couple, robust couples that have a spark and I ask people, "Can you

give me a few examples of those that inspire you?" The majority of the people can maybe name one couple.

If I ask them to tell me a list of business people that inspire them or innovators or creatives or musicians or artists, the list are endless. I have yet to see people give me five couples that they say those people inspire me, they have a spark, great relationships. Whenever we say, "This doesn't work," I think a part of it is because it's new, there are no scripts, it requires a certain maturity, it isn't the right thing for people who have anxious attachment, it really is not for everybody. The other thing doesn't seem to have rubbed that well either. If Apple sold you a product that fails 50% of the time, you wouldn't buy it but that's what's happening with modern marriage.

Relationships today are complex, the relationship rule books are shifting under our feet, people have to navigate a host of new challenges that never existed before. Multiple decisions that they have to make for themselves that used to be made by religious institutions. I don't know we know where this is going to go. I don't know that it's a fad. Not too long ago we would have said the blended family, impossible, impossible. What does that mean? You're going to raise the kids of somebody else? We're often very quick at dismissing when people are trying new things. I don't think that blended family is for everybody. Some people should not even bother trying and I don't think some people should have kids and I don't think some people should try to do. When I say should, meaning it's not for them.

They may try and then realize that's not the way I want to live my life. I also think that some people may not live their life in one way only if they're going to live as long as we do. You may try a period of this, and then a decade of something else depending on where you are at. Who would have thought we could have gay families with children? Could they have kids? What would it mean to have two mothers or two fathers raising a child? We have shifted so many norms. I did a lot of work this week around assault. I led a bunch of conversations around the mutual movement at this moment and how to create change, social change. I just was thinking besides the LGBT experience, corporal punishment.

It's only two generations to go, it was absolutely normal to hit your kid because it build character rather than to talk to your kid and to explain. People used to say that's a fact. Try talking with your children like you are sort of reasonable people, they just need a good lesson. Today, it's inconceivable in the West to think that corporal punishment is the norm. When you go to other examples, it helps you see how something that once began as a minority people that challenged the norm, at some point, not all of them, can become a new norm. Then when you look back you wonder how did this happen. Teachers were paddling students, it was normal in every educational institution to get hit.

I just look constantly for other major relationships changes like that and then you get a perspective that when you're in the beginning, when you're in the

thick of a new thing that emerges, it looks like it's a bunch of crazy stuff. I'll give you another example that for me is probably the most relevant. I spent 20 years working with mixed couples, interracial, intercultural, interreligious couples. People used to say, impossible. Marriage is hard enough, those relationships never work. Now, remember the first intermarriage in America was Catholic and Protestants. It doesn't work, crazy people. Then it was Jews and Gentiles, it doesn't work, crazy people. Then it was black and white because that was criminal not too long ago.

Everybody said this doesn't work. Part of why it sometimes didn't work is because these couples were so isolated. The majority of poly people don't tell people they are poly or non-monogamous people, they can't even say that out loud because their jobs, they can't say that out loud. Once things become more integrated and maybe they are less isolated, maybe then actually they get more resources from watching other people do it and maybe then things begin to work better. We don't know if it doesn't work for all kinds of personality reasons or if it doesn't work because it doesn't have yet sustainability from the society.

Dave Asprey: Got it. There's a lot of judgment that can be out there that can create relationship stress that wouldn't otherwise be there. That makes a lot of sense.

Esther Perel: I'm giving you complex answers.

Dave Asprey: No, this is what this show is about. It is a system and I love your answers that's why I wanted you to be on stage at the conference. Now, you mentioned earlier that some people go to attorneys if there's infidelity in their marriage and some people go to a therapist. Now, how would people know what's the best choice? Do you flip a coin? How do you know? What would the thought process be?

Esther Perel: I would always say you go to a therapist first. I would say the same thing if you're in business, I would say you go to a coach first, to go to a mediator first. You go to the non-antagonistic, non-adversary approaches first. You go to try to not change the other but you try to go and you try to change yourself first. It depends, if I'm three months with you, we don't have that much invested. [00:36:30] We just began, six months, one year, two years. If we have 20 years together, 15 years together, we've built something. It's worth it. It goes by the investment.

Dave Asprey: I've offered that advice to a few friends over the years, saying, look, if your car was seriously broken, you're probably not going to open up the hood and try and repair a modern car. You go to an expert to see what's wrong and then to see what the right choice would be. We have this do it yourself mentality here where especially around relationships or maybe I'll ask a couple of friends who aren't necessary experts in relationships either and then you wander off. Certainly, I did that earlier on in my relationships. I've been in a faithful marriage for more than a decade but before that, I think there's also times in life when people are younger there tends to be more relationship stuff because you haven't had as much practice.

I would just offer that to people listening, if there are problems in your relationship, you need to go see someone like Esther to talk about it because you want someone who studied the problem and can help you diagnose it and figure out whether calling an attorney make sense or whether you want to reinvest in the relationship. Doing it all by yourself is just the worst thing you can do because you don't have enough data to make a good decision. I love your answer there.

Esther Perel: I'll add one other thing. It's really interesting, it's a line that I say to many people in my office, we all have relationship issues that we're going to need to work on. All of us. It's just part of human nature. The only question is going to be with whom. You don't want to work on them in this relationship, you're going to have to work on them in the next relationship because you're the constant factor.

Dave Asprey: Personal development matters.

Esther Perel: At some point you're going to have to look at yourself, my dear. How you communicate, how you avoid, how you fight, how you dismiss, how you judge, how you elude, all the things you do, how you compete, all the stuff we do. It's okay if you say you don't want to do it with this person but you're going to have to at some point do it. Sometimes I say, you know what, people, you may just as well do it now and then you'll decide what you want to do with your relationship. When people actually become more equipped, more skillful, more self-aware, relationally self-aware not experts on what the other person is doing wrong, the relationship often improves and then they don't need to ask me if they need to go to the lawyer. They tell me, "I think we came and did what we were supposed to do here."

Dave Asprey: I absolutely love that answer and thank you for sharing that. For people listening, Esther is a top expert in the field. She knows what she's talking about there. There's no way to escape personal growth, either you can hide from it in your relationship or in other parts of your life or you can just face it. The earlier you face it and the more deeply you face it, the better off everything is, not just your relationship but your performance or happiness, everything. Thank you. Thank you for putting it the way you did.

I have another question for you. You have your own podcast called, "Where Should We Begin?" You go into a lot of universal truths about modern love but some of the podcasts are really gut wrenching. How do you both for podcast and just as a therapist, how do you leave that energy behind? How do stay sane when you're dealing with all these people in a lot of pain and all that all the time? What's your practice for just letting go and staying grounded yourself?

Esther Perel: That's a great question. I do a lot of physical stuff. I do much better if I've been actually active physically in the morning before I start to see patients. It could be running, it could be the gym, it could be yoga, but I need to move. It's like my body has to wake up. I have days where I come home at the end of many hours

of being in the trenches of people's pain, and I don't want to talk to anybody, I just want to be quiet and I bike home. I bike everywhere. That trip on the bike actually, I bike on the bike path where the terrorist attack was yesterday. That's my street actually. I just feel like I can calm down, I'm outside. Sometimes I just want to go out and see friends. I want to be with my people who are now nurturing me. I get fed by my friends. I get fed by my husband.

My boys are out of the house now but I would call them and we'll chat together. I think I'm very surrounded by people, by my own connections in which I'm not in that role. I have a lot of fun, I go to see art. I do things that are not about work. I have a life outside of my work. It's probably a very important thing. I travel and I do things that I enjoy doing. I have learned over the years to not bring it home like that. I'm lucky that my husband is also a psychologist and if I'm really overwhelmed or plagued by something, "I have to talk a few minutes, can I share a case with you?" Just what's my experience, what I felt today, the fear I have, the uncertainty about something I did. There are situations that are really complicated and then I call colleagues.

I call colleagues and I say, "I need you to collaborate on this case with me. This is too much for me alone. This is complicated." A supervision, "This is not my expertise," I know what I don't know, this is one thing you get with experience. You know the things that you really, you have seen this before, you know it. Like you, but then there is a situation where this one is the expert on that, I have not dealt with that kind of suicide, I have not dealt with that kind of eating disorder, I have not dealt with that kind of prison life, I haven't dealt with so many things that I haven't dealt with then I call the people who I think know a lot about it and I say, "Do you have a moment for me?" I'm so good at reaching out and asking for help, that's one thing I've never struggled with is to reach out and get help.

Dave Asprey: You're taking your own advice. You call an expert.

Esther Perel: Yes, yes, yes.

Dave Asprey: Some people seem to have learned that from their parents who were that way, that was one of my biggest weaknesses in my 20s was that I wouldn't ask anyone for help. It limited my career, it limited the relationships. If you're listening to this and that strikes home for you, it's really a good idea to rely on experts to help you move more quickly through whatever you're working on.

Esther Perel: You know what I have done? I have wrote experts into my office. I have a few people who I admire who I think when I am stuck and I don't know where to go anymore with people, I call them and I say, "I would like you to see this couple." I bring the other therapist in my office to see the couples or the person in front of me while I learn watching them work.

Dave Asprey: Awesome.

Esther Perel: I did that when I was 30 but I can do that now.

Dave Asprey: That's impressive.

Esther Perel: My private university, it's not just that I ask the expert, I watch the expert do it. Any of you who can be apprentice, it's the old model of the apprentice. I was mentored so this is a very easy way for me, show me how you do it. Let me see you do it and I'll learn one or two things from your art and I'll become better.

Dave Asprey: Very beautifully put. In your career so far, Esther, what's the single moment that you're most grateful for, most proud of, the thing that really stick, it's like this made the most difference?

Esther Perel: I think there would be many but if I look at recently, I would say the most important decision that I made almost three years ago was to step outside of the clinical world in which I was living. I primarily until then had worked in the professional world of psychology. With the TED Talk, the second TED Talk in particular, I decided I'm going to not just be a therapist, I'm going to become a thought leader. I mean, that you set out to become a thought leader but I have knowledge, here's what I thought. I have knowledge as a therapist that our society needs. I'm not the only one. I think in general, we understand certain things about human relations and we are not enough outside our offices.

That's why I did the podcast, that's why I write the books, that's why I have the YouTube channel. I think that therapist really begin to be locked into their little rooms with the four walls where they dispense such important experience, knowledge, and help and it is needed on a society level. It's not just for a few individuals who have the privilege of being able to see us. The experience of scaling this, of making this available, and of really saying, I'm going to change the conversation about some of this things. I'm not just going to change the life of a few people.

To believe that I have enough to do that, because you know, am I really the one, maybe this one should do it. I'm not good enough, what do I know? I'm only an expert ... At some point I just said no, I actually know a lot. I'm not right but I can contribute an enormous amount. It's not like I have the only answer but I have a certain way of thinking that I think at this point is needed by more than what I can accomplish in my little cubicle. From that moment on, my entire career changed.

Dave Asprey: Beautiful. If you'll indulge me a little bit, you were at the Bulletproof Conference. What was your experience when you went on stage, when you led the breakout work afterwards? Just describe it for me.

Esther Perel: I mean, there is nothing I like more than working with the people and to really go in with an audience, do the interventions, speak. It's kind of a group therapy in mass, you know. To see that people are not just learning something but they

are experiencing something, they're experiencing in the moment the possibility for a better life. I think that is the notion of love hacking, relationship hacking, that you can actually intervene yourself in a system that is dysregulated or that is hungry and you can feed it better. I love the concepts that I learned.

I learn languages, I listen to your language and the language of Bulletproof and I see that this is totally applicable to relationships. It starts with the fact that you include relationships in your conference because that in itself for me is a marker of something because I can see the places where it's left out. Everything else is addressed but relationships. It's performance on every level.

Dave Asprey: When not at home, right?

Esther Perel: Not at home or simply not, it's not about the relationships, it's not about the being, it's about the doing. It's all relationships, even at work. If you're going to perform better, you still need to connect with the people you're trying to work with. That is a tribute to you. I thought it was a great energy. I thought there was an energy of people who love to learn and who are quite hopeful in their ability to affect change in their lives. They live with the sense of agency and they were mature. There was a certain kind of ... I'm not a simple thinker sometimes.

I realize that people sometimes want one, two, three, and techniques and quick fixes and I have always thought if you think differently, you will act differently. Often you act inaccurately and mistakenly and misguided because your thinking is off. I don't need to tell you what to do. If I give you a shift in your perception, in your story, you will know how to act differently and you will make it fit you because otherwise the one, two, three, you can't have mass answers. Every life is quite unique.

Dave Asprey: That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that. It's always nice to see a perspective of someone who's very different than I am on it. I will just say, if you want to perform better, you have to be a good person and that's oftentimes missing from the dialog.

Esther Perel: Right.

Dave Asprey: We're coming up on the end of the show and there's a question that I've asked every guest and I'm really eager to hear your answer to it. If someone come up to you tomorrow and said, "Esther, I want to perform better at everything I do as a human being, what are the three most important piece of advice you'd have for me?" What would you offer them?

Esther Perel: I think I always go on the number one back to my father who I would ask him, "What was it like in the concentration camps? How did you know who were the good ones and who are not the good ones? Who did you trust? How did you know whom to trust?" All of these questions, he always said, "My darling, the number one value in the world is human decency. Decency, it doesn't matter

how rich and how smart a person is, if they can't think of you even more than they would think about themselves, they're not a good human being." I must have been very young but that thing stuck. I still think it is the right value for me. It's how you treat the other and your ability to think about the other is number one.

Number two is your ability to see yourself as a flawed individual while still holding yourself in high regards which I consider the most beautiful definition of self-esteem is not to be perfect, it's actually to be able to see your imperfection and then still hold yourself in high regards. That is much more realistic. The third one is probably for me more than happiness is meaning. It's what is the meaning, why do you do what you do, and what does your life mean to you and to the others. Again, back to my dad, one of the greatest definitions of charisma I ever heard was my dad was not charismatic. He was not at all a big personality.

I have much more the personality of my mom but my father, when you were in his presence, you felt that you mattered. That's why people came to see him till he was 90 years old frail in his home. Everybody continued to come visit him of all ages because they felt good when they came to see him because he had a way of making you feel important. Somebody one day said to me, your father is so charismatic. I thought it's such an interesting definition of charisma is less about you and about how you make the others feel when they're in your presence.

Dave Asprey: Beautiful.

Esther Perel: Those would be the three things.

Dave Asprey: Thank you, Esther and thanks for being on Bulletproof Radio. People can find out more about your book which is called, "The State of Affairs," I think anywhere books are sold. Your podcast is, "Where Should We Begin?" What URL should they go to to learn more?

Esther Perel: Estherperel.com, on my website, on YouTube, on social, Esther Perel Official. Yes, the books, "Mating In Captivity," is my first book as well. Where Should We Begin is unscripted, anonymous couples counseling sessions where you literally are invited into my office to listen to how I work with other couples and get some of the ideas and vocabulary for your own relationships, all sorts of relationships. Sessions with Esther Perel is my platform where I try to bring all the current knowledge on relationships for coaches, life coaches, therapist, educators, interdisciplinary, that's a training platform. I have a beautiful testimonial that you did for me at Mastermind Talks about three, four years ago before we even met. I think you had only heard me speak, do you remember that?

Dave Asprey: Yeah, I do.

Esther Perel: I think you should put that one up too. It was very beautiful what you had to say.

Dave Asprey: Awesome, I will find it on your website and absolutely put it up. Thanks again for being on Bulletproof Radio. Thanks for your work, thanks for deciding to step outside of your office and share some of your knowledge and wisdom and life experience because when I work with people, when I talk with people one on one, there are a lot of people suffering around their relationships and they're willing to work out, they're willing to eat right, but this is like that deep, dark stuff they won't look at. You're just courageously going out there and helping people to pay attention to that as there's something else they can hack so I appreciate it.

Esther Perel: I never thought of my workshop, Rekindling Desire which is also on my website. It's a whole course for people to connect to their own spark relationally as a hack but now I'm going to use that.

Dave Asprey: It will work. Have a beautiful day. Thanks, Esther.

Esther Perel: Thank you, it's a pleasure. Bye.

Dave Asprey: If you appreciated today's episode, check out Esther's work. Also, take a minute to head on over to [bulletproof.com/itunes](http://bulletproof.com/itunes). It will take you directly to the page where you can subscribe to the podcast. You can also leave a review, I look at those reviews, I read them and it really matters because it helps other people find the show. Please take ten seconds to head over to [bulletproof.com/itunes](http://bulletproof.com/itunes) which will take you right to the iTunes page and just leave a quick review. It really matters to me. Thank you.