**TRQ\_Bad Chaplaincy Part 2.mp3**

**Casper** [00:00:45] I'm Casper ter Kuile.

**Vanessa** [00:00:59] And I'm Vanessa Zoltan

**Casper** [00:01:00] And this is the real question. And really, it's three real questions today because we're going to be answering some more of our listener questions. We had so much fun last time we did this, and the questions are so good. I feel like each one of the questions I'm going to share with you today are relevant to us, as well.

**Vanessa** [00:01:31] Oh, absolutely. I got to pick the questions. And I was like, these are questions I have too thank you for asking.

**Casper** [00:01:39] (Laughs) Thank you so much to everyone who is a member of our patron community. You are the ones who keep this show going. So if you've enjoyed the show this year because it's nearly been a year, pretty much.

**Vanessa** [00:01:50] I know.

**Casper** [00:01:51] We would love to have you support us on Patron and you get access to all sorts of fun little bonuses, little episodes. I have a monthly moment of inspiration where I share a favorite poem or a piece of music. We do bonus Lectios and you get to join our incredible community on discord as well. So join us on patreon at patreon.com/realquestionpod. You can select a membership level of three bucks a month $10, $25 and you can choose which text we might use in future episodes.

**Vanessa** [00:02:21] You know, Buffy recently was a Patreon suggestion.

**Casper** [00:02:24] As was Mary Oliver. So thank you again to everyone who's already joined us. We are so grateful.

**Vanessa** [00:02:29] We are going to be making some Patreon announcements for the New Year, but we love making the show and we can't do it without your support. So please do join us on Patreon, it’s where the party is.

**Casper** [00:02:38] The party is raging. It is an all nighter that hasn't stopped since March. You don't want to miss out.

**Vanessa** [00:02:44] I know so many of our patrons are listening right now being like, I'm sorry, I'm so tired from all the partying.

**Casper** [00:02:51] un tss un tss un tss un tss un tss

**Casper and Vanessa** (Laughs)

**Vanessa** [00:03:20] Okay. So Caspar, our first question I brought because I felt it so hard. And so I just want to say that I know nothing about this person, which I feel like helps actually right. Like this person who sent in the question, I don't know their race, their gender, anything about them, but this is what it says. “How do I deal with not wanting to work? I'm not like I'm waiting for a dream job, but I just don't want to keep a job and work my life away to maybe retire in 30 plus years.”

And we got versions of this question in many ways, like, ‘I hate my job, can I quit?’ ‘I can afford to quit’, or ‘I can't really afford to quit, but I want to quit anyway.’

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** This question was just sort of the most honest about this. Like, I don't want to work, I hate working. So I just want to say that I, I love this question and I hard core, relate.

**Casper** [00:04:12] I fully, fully relate. Like I had a bit of a cry breakdown evening a couple of days ago and I literally asked Sean. I was like, what is the point? Like, tell me like what are we working towards? Because like we made a choice to like move, to the big city and pursue our dreams and like it hasn't obviously turned out quite that way, over the last two years, but more deeply, this was the question I was asking, which is like, why is that really to retire in 30 years and then go traveling? Is it really about, like starting a hobby, of flower arranging when I have time to do that during the day and I'm not exhausted at the end of the day. And all I want to do is watch, you know, the great British Baking Show. What is the point? And I love that this question isn't the practical.

**Vanessa** Right

**Casper** Like, should I quit, right? Like it's how do I deal with not wanting to work? Because reality is like most of us have to, to be able to live.

**Vanessa** Right.

**Casper** And so it just feels really nuanced because it's like, yeah, we're in the midst of this great resignation at the moment, right? My pizza that I ordered last night was delayed, delayed, delayed and then canceled because, like, no one was there to pick it up. And you know what? I totally understand. Like, I didn't even resent it.

**Vanessa** [00:05:28] I know that's the thing, right? Is this question is eternal and it's also so of the moment.

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** Right. Like people do not want to go back to work right now. This is like an economic crisis that I'm going to be fascinated to see unfold. It is a little bit I want to watch it all burn down. I'm like, what's going to happen? There's obviously a concern that the wealthy companies are going to be able to offer enough that they'll stay open and smaller. Mom and pop shops won't be able to, you know, all of that. And I don't believe that the good companies survive. So but I do think COVID has made us rethink things because part of the rhythm of work and the joy of work, even though it was oppressive, was the office was going somewhere and being social all day and talking to people at the water cooler. And, you know, as complicated and difficult as that was, like then you went out to lunch with people. It was deeply social.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** And now with that gone, it's really like, what am I doing? I am walking thousands of steps a day without leaving my apartment. Like, why?

**Casper** [00:06:37] What for? Yeah, 100%. Yeah, I really appreciate that. You're saying, look, yes, there are the structural things like obviously we need a higher minimum wage. Obviously, it's absurd that there's no paid parental leave. America should have much longer mandatory vacations. Right. There's all of those structural things. And nonetheless, how do we deal with that deeper, like not wanting to work?

**Vanessa** [00:06:57] The other thing I want to add to that, Casper, is so I am privileged in about a million ways and I have student debt and I have expensive health care, right? Because I have health issues. Like last month, I had to pay $2,000 in health care bills because I needed certain things done that my insurance company said was fully covered. And by fully covered, they meant that I owed $2,000. And those two things in the United States just don't have to be true. Right.

**Casper** A 100%

**Vanessa** That I now owe all of this money. So I'm just restating what you're saying of like I even think that within my really privileged class, even that there's still differences that, you know, makes everyone listening to this question, I think, think about their realities just slightly differently.

**Casper** [00:07:49] 100%. Yeah. And as you said, like caring responsibilities come into that and like generational wealth and ownership, there's so much baked into it. And so, again, like, that's why I like this question.

**Vanessa** Right

**Casper** Because it's really about more like, how do we make it in the meantime, right? Knowing that we don't always have the choices that we want to have. How do I deal with not wanting to work.

**Vanessa** Yeah.

**Casper** And it also allows that it might be in flux. Like definitely I would have that feeling pre-COVID. Now and then.

**Vanessa** Sure

**Casper** Now it's much more *now* and then.

**Vanessa** [00:08:21] All the time. I live in this feeling.

**Casper** [00:08:25] Yeah, exactly. I just want to, like, light out of the grass and, like, look up at the sky and, like, listen to a song and then maybe make a sandwich and have a nap and then read a little and then, like, have people over for dinner and games. That's really what I want.

**Vanessa** [00:08:43] Yep and eat, like, delicious food.

**Casper** [00:08:45] Oh. So let's think about what texts we might bring to this question. My mind really went to Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, which is seasonally one of my favorite books. You know, I love listening to that story. I grew up with it. And there's this one moment where Ebenezer Scrooge, who, of course, is this work Obsessed, selfish, greedy guy, just all around unpleasant person. And he gets visited by these three ghosts who remind him of Christmas past, present and illustrate his future. And we see this beautiful transformation in his heart. And one of the scenes that the ghost of Christmas past takes him to is where he was a clerk. So when he was a young professional learning his trade and his boss was called Mr. Fezziwig. And even though, you know, the work that they were doing was pretty similar, right? They have ledges. They're doing, I think, some sort of accounting, maybe. Scrooge talks about how Fezziwig had the power to make a task, a pain or a joy that he was able to take work, which is in itself maybe not that pleasant, but he could turn it into something that brought joy, and the ghost of Christmas past takes Scrooge and us into this scene where they host a ball in the office, they sweep the floors, they move the desks to the side. They've hired some musicians. There's a big bowl of punch and everyone comes in, you know, lovely ladies and ribbons and there's dancing and, you know, there's just merriment and there's something beautiful that happens in Scrooge's memory because, like, the work is transformed and it's in stark contrast with what he's doing to his clerk. Bob Cratchit And so I love that you were pointing to the watercooler, which is such a stereotype, but it's true in the sense that there is a social encounter and that you know, that the resources of the workplace can actually become a place of friendship and celebration and like doing good in the world. Right? Like they spend some money and hire musicians. Like it's not changing the world per se, but it's, it's changing the nature of work. And I don't want to turn this into, like hire table tennis tables for your office because, like, that's not what I mean. But there is something more beautiful and more lovely that this scene illustrates that feels like it speaks to the question.

**Vanessa** [00:10:54] Yeah. And I mean, it's definitely inspiring me as someone who is the boss of, trying to find ways to make our work joyful is so hard. Everyone works remotely, which is a gift, right? You're in New York, Ariana's in Maine. AJ is in Los Angeles, Laura's in New Mexico. Like..

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** And I think, you know, we all like it that way to a large extent. And most of us were in the Boston area at first. And, you know, not having to leave your job in order to move, I think is a gift. But yeah, it would be really hard for me to throw a ball.

**Casper** [00:11:31] Or at least that would just be like avatars of us dancing.

**Vanessa** [00:11:33] Yeah.

**Casper** [00:11:34] Which is not quite the same.

**Vanessa** [00:11:35] It's not the same. And it's still like, yes, I think that one of the ways to deal with the fact that we don't want to work is to acknowledge that work is our lives. I hate the phrase work-life balance.

**Casper** Yes, yes.

**Vanessa** Because work is your life. You're living your life while you're at work.

**Casper** Yes.

**Vanessa** So I love that you're pointing us to like one of the ways to deal with that is to try to make your work as joyful as possible while acknowledging that obviously not all of us have the power to do that.

**Casper** [00:12:06] That's so interesting because you're actually helping me understand what I also like about the Fezziwig moment. It's like they know that the normal work isn't fun. Like by creating something that is fun, you're actually allowing everyone to be like, ‘Yeah, you know what? What we're doing most of the time isn't that interesting.’ And like so much of the worst, like toxic work culture comes from having to pretend that you're enjoying something that you're not and like, it makes such a difference to be able to show up to a team meeting and just be like, ‘Guys, I'm not really motivated right now. Like, it'll get done, but like, I'm not doing this because it brings me great joy.’ Like, then at least you don't have to pretend. And so I don't know, I'm suddenly seeing that that's such an important part of like how do we deal with this is like, let's be honest with each other. Like, let's not try and sell a story which just makes everyone else feel worse.

**Vanessa** [00:12:57] Yeah, I was going to do one source, which I'll mention in a little bit, but what you just said made me think of something else that I think is more apt, which is at the end of A Chorus Line, The Great Seventies musical, right? A Chorus Line is an audition musical where everybody is auditioning for a part and there is this. Woman who the director knows and he's like, ‘Why are you auditioning to be in the chorus? You are a star. You used to be a star.’ And at the end, she's like, ‘I love being in the chorus. This is it. This is the stuff of life. Like, aren't they beautiful? These, like, workaday dancers.’ And I also think that that's part of it is seeing the data entry as beautiful.

**Casper** Mm.

**Vanessa** Right. And again, like, it's complicated because not in a, like I'm serving capitalism way, but sometimes I'll think like I don't want to just like wash the dishes. And then it's like, who am I to be above washing the dishes, right? People have been washing the dishes forever, and it's a gift to be alive. And washing the dishes has never been easier. And, you know, people for thousands of years have been doing this. And I am part of this great flow of humanity, including the frustration.

**Casper** Mm hmm.

**Vanessa** And I think that, again, while attempting to separate ourselves from capitalism, seeing that people have been folding laundry and working in assembly lines and right. Like this is what it is to be alive on this earth. And I think to some extent, we should sort of see it as an honor and a gift to be alive at all.

**Casper** [00:14:39] Yeah, that's beautiful. Vanessa and I really you're taking this kind of, like, advertising narrative out of the reality of life, and it's like, no, not every day is going to be bungee jumping in New Zealand unless you are a bungee jumping instructor in New Zealand, in which case good for you. You make good choices.

**Vanessa** [00:14:57] Well then also stops being fun.

**Casper** [00:15:00] That's true. Yeah, it's working. Like working in an ice cream place. Like after two weeks of, like, I never want to taste the ice cream ever again.

**Vanessa** [00:15:07] Totally.

**Casper** [00:15:07] So there's this kind of narrative that we have of, like, everything should be always incredible and, like, live your best life, be the best you. And it's like, well, most of the time the ironing needs doing and kids need to be picked up from school. And, you know, I have to prepare for this presentation, and I so get stuck into that mental pattern of like, well, when this is done.

**Vanessa** [00:15:27] Right. Right. And it's like, nope, this is it.

**Casper** [00:15:32] No, it's like this. This is it. Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:15:34] The other thing I want to say, so I was going to bring a quote from an Instagram called The Nap Ministry run by Tricia Hersi, who's a black woman. And so I don't know how she would feel about how much her Instagram means to me, because she's definitely talking to black women for the most part.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** And she just has this, like her thesis is ‘rest is resistance’. And that is something that I think is true across the board. Right? That if we do not define ourselves by our accomplishments, I just think that that's a really important part of this as well. And I think that for white men, maybe work is resistance, maybe saying, no, no, I'm going to clear the table and I'm going to do the dishes and I'm going to do the washing up. Right, like. I think that that is part of the resistance. And I think for black women, napping is the resistance. But I also think that all of us within our lives right. And for white men saying dishes is my resistance not making more money. Right.

**Casper** Right.

**Vanessa** I just think thinking about ways to resist within the system is also an important invitation.

**Casper** [00:16:41] Yeah, it's a great account to follow. And she's, she's, she's spicy on Twitter and all the right ways too. So definitely follow the NAP ministry. But yeah, she's she really talks about grind culture as part of what brings us into the place that we're in. Right. It's never enough. There's always more. And this culture of hustling hard. But for what? Right. That's the question. And I think she is someone who knows really, really well, like this is all there is. And there's an ancestral lens that she as a black person, is bringing into the context in the United States as well, that's really important. If, like, you know, my people have worked plenty and more than they ever should have, and so I'm going to claim the rest that they were never able to have. And it's a beautiful like she uses rest and sleep and napping in this beautifully politically active way from which I definitely, you know, even if it's not written for me, I get to learn from. And so I love that.

**Vanessa** [00:17:35] Thank you so much to whoever you are who asked this beautiful question. Yes. Let's all work less and find more joy in our work.

**Casper** [00:17:44] Hmm. Well, the second question comes from Jessica Rose, and Jessica asks, “How do you know when you're on the right path? Career wise, relationships wise? Is it all gut feeling? And if it is, is that enough?” So how do you know when you're on the right path? Vanessa, you've been on the right path for some time. How did you know?

**Vanessa** [00:18:19] I know. I mean, obviously, I think that this person is on a fine path and I'm just like doesn't know if there's a slightly better one. Right. That's where I'm imagining this question coming from, because I definitely think, you know, if you're on a horrible path, if you're like, I dread every day of my life like that, that is not easy. But like simple. That's simple. And so I would imagine that this is like ‘I like my life, but it could be better’. And there's this, like, urgency around, like, but I only have one life and it could be better.

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** But I have my first instinct response, which is ‘You don't know. Now suck it up.’

**Casper** (Laughs)

**Vanessa** It's not where I going to land, but that's my first answer. Like you super don't. Oh, well.

**Casper** [00:19:09] Okay. I want to hear more about that. Like, is that what you say to yourself when you have this question?

**Vanessa** [00:19:14] Yeah. So, like, I sort of thought long and hard to not dread my life. I definitely have had periods where I dreaded my life. And so now I don't. And like none of us know if we're on the right path. And I think that you should leave yourself open to moments of inspiration. But I think the beauty of so much is in the digging in. Right. Like I could think about the fact that I would have probably had a different and like beautiful life as a nurse practitioner, which is what my alternate life looks like in my head.

**Casper** [00:19:47] You would be so good as an NP.

**Vanessa** Thank you.

**Casper** No nonsense, but caretaking, direct and clear, like, oh, Vanessa, this really going to be that different? Whoa.

**Vanessa** [00:20:00] I know. And, like, clear delineation. Like, you come home, you leave your work behind at the office. Total meaning making at the office. I like really would have been amazing at this but like, for various reasons. And I won't throw too much shade at my father. I am not a nurse practitioner, and I am this and like I became an accidental podcaster. And it's like now my job to get to know other podcasters and learn about basic editing and learn what EQ means. And the more I get into it, the more I love it. And so I just think that there's also just, like, an embracing of the path that you're on.

**Casper** [00:20:37] Yeah, yeah, I really see that. I mean, the other thing I hear in this question is a sort of like a malaise or an ennui. That's two little French words for you.

**Vanessa** [00:20:48] Oui, oui.

**Casper** [00:20:49] (Laughs) Oui, oui. But just that sense of, like, ‘is this it?’ You know, just that kind of dissatisfaction. Not, not as you said, if things are really going badly, you're not asking this question.

**Vanessa** Yeah.

**Casper** So I really appreciate that reframe. And at the same time, there's this kind of longing that's inherent in this question of like, I think there is more to life. And at the same time, I do want to affirm that, that sense and I don't mean by that like, oh, great riches or fame or power, but like there are people who I've met who are able to live in this deeper satisfaction. And this is why I've ended up kind of in the world of spirituality and religion, because so often I don't know those people with that kind of spiritual maturity is the way I usually describe it as there's just wisdom there, and not in a book learning wisdom way, although it can be part of it. But it's like a life wisdom way, like they've lived it, and they are able to pay attention and be present and be generous and compassionate, like way beyond what I can ever muster. And I'm like, that is really living. And so how do we know we're on the right path? I always try and think like, ‘Am I becoming more like that? Do I notice in myself that I'm more patient now than I used to be?’ You know, ‘Am I more generous.’ And most of the time the answer is ‘No’, it's not what I want to be more like that. But so, I both want to affirm, you know, exactly what you're saying, which is like, listen, be happy where you are. Like, things could be so much worse and also make room for this sense of longing and, and deepening in life.

**Vanessa** [00:22:10] Well, and I don't just mean be happy with where you are. I mean, like, the more you dig in, the happier you will be. Right. Like, if you buy a house and you're like, it's a starter house, like. But if you're like, ‘do you know what? This is where we live. Let's plant a garden. Let's you know, plant tulips for next spring when the tulips pop up, they're going to be more joyful.’

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** So I don't just mean suck it up. I mean live fully into your life because it will be better. I always used to be, like, really judgy of people who painted their rentals, right? I was like, ‘Why are you improving the space? It's not yours.’ And now I'm like, ‘It's yours for now. Everything is only ours for now. So, like, paint your rental right?’ Like, I'm just like, we need to embrace the life that we have. And so. Yeah.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** Plant your tulips, paint your rental.

**Casper** [00:23:04] I love that. We just renewed our lives and like, we painted, and we really made that decision. We're like, we're going to be here for at least another two years. Like, let's paint. Like, let's make it as beautiful as it can be.

**Vanessa** [00:23:15] Yeah.

**Casper** [00:23:15] What text did you think about for this question, Vanessa?

**Vanessa** [00:23:18] So I brought a book that I love and frustrates me, but I overall really love this book. It's called Motherhood, and it's by Sheila Hardy, who's a great writer.

**Casper** Hmm.

**Vanessa** So throughout the book, it's this woman. The narrator is trying to decide whether or not to have kids. And she is writing the book, and she's constantly flipping coins and she's asking the coins questions like, ‘Is it good enough that I'm happy with my partner for now, but I'm not sure if I can picture us together in five years?’ And she flips the coin and the coin will say ‘no’, and she'll reframe the question and be like, ‘Oh, do you mean no, It's not okay that I stay with him?’ Or do you like, and so she like nuances it down. And what frustrates me and is amazing about this book is this note at the beginning that says in this book, all results from the flipping of coins result from the flipping of actual coins. And so Sheila Heti, the writer, didn't know where the book was going in certain ways and really flipped coins as part of her writing process.

**Casper** [00:24:19] Wow.

**Vanessa** [00:24:19] And she ended with this really beautiful book. Right. And what she knew was that she wanted to write a novel about a woman who is ambivalent about having children. And like that is what she knew she wanted to do. And she didn't know where it was going to go. And she was just like, this is going to be kind of random, but I'm going to trust that it's going to take me to a meaningful place. And that seems to me to be like the sweet spot of like committing to the randomness but having an idea of how you want to be or what you want to be.

**Casper** Hmm.

**Vanessa** So is just a sort of a sweet spot to me.

**Casper** [00:24:57] Mm hmm. What an incredible way to write like that is in some ways, like, very trusting. I would be terrified of letting go of those kinds of decisions to the coins. What a cool concept.

**Vanessa** [00:25:07] Well, it's also very trusting of her own talent to right, that like she's going to be able to. So, first of all, this practice is inspired by the I ching and like this ancient Chinese ritual of praying and conversation with the flipping of a coin, which she also talks about in the book. But she's like, I'm going to be able to work this out regardless of how the coin flips. But she asks the coin specific questions, just not just like, what should I do? Should I be a fire person or a gardener? And like, those are totally random. Right. She's asking them very specific, discerning questions. So, it's only within sort of a margin that it's up to the coin. But at the end of the day, yeah, it's up to the coin.

**Casper** [00:25:49] Yeah. Well, this connects in a cool way with the text that I chose because I think that both really practices of reflection. Right. So if you're asking this question of how do you know that you're on the right path, it demands introspection. It demands a sitting with this question being like, well, let's really think about it. The text I chose still on the musical theme was ‘The Sound of Music’, one of the greatest movies ever made. And it's the scene where Maria, who has started out as a nun and is sent to be a governess in this family, realizes she's in love with the man that she works for, and she wouldn't be with Georg and his whistle and that she you know, she also loves these seven children, right, that she's now in this maternal role with and she runs away. It's too much like she feels uncomfortable with what she's discovered about her own desire. And so she goes back to the convent and she goes to see the Mother Superior. And she, in this, like, older woman voice, sings that great song ‘Climb Every Mountain’. And it's less the lyrics of that song that I want to point to. But it's really the scene where this younger woman and this older woman are sitting in a smaller room talking essentially about What should I do with my life? You know, I thought I wanted to be a nun. Now I'm falling in love with this man. And I'm afraid, like, that's what Maria is really saying. Like, ‘I'm afraid.’ And I think there's something beautiful about an intergenerational conversation in these moments. I have found so often when I'm like, ‘Am I on the right path? Like, is this the right thing?’ It's not that my friend's aren’t lovely to talk to, but there's a set of experiences that someone who's older will have gone through. Or maybe it's a perspective. It's not that they've lived through the same thing, but they have lived long enough to know what this phase of life is all about. That just puts whatever feelings that have and usually that big feelings into context of a wider life. And so that's what I'm really thinking about. It's like, Yeah, how do you know that you're on the right path? You can't know. But can you talk with someone who's older and maybe wiser and they probably won't know either, but they'll help you feel more confident or comfortable in the unknowing. That's what I see in that scene that feels. Relevant to me.

**Vanessa** [00:27:58] That absolutely feels true to me. And one of the things that I love about intergenerational friendships is how much people give me permission to be just not as hard on myself.

**Casper** Yes.

**Vanessa** And I feel like that is again and again the thing that both older people and younger people teach me. Right, is like there's something about the distance of stages that's like, why are you being so hard on yourself, right? Like, why? Why are you taking this so seriously? There's something that the distance can teach you about not taking yourself too seriously.

**Casper** [00:28:36] Yeah, that's one of those great, self-reflective exercises of like, okay, imagine your friend is in the situation you're in. What would you say to your friend? You're like, ‘Oh, that sounds really tough. I'm sorry about that. Like, have you thought about maybe giving it some time.’ instead of being like, ‘I am the worst, I've failed at everything.’ Like (Laughs)

**Vanessa** [00:28:55] It is, without a doubt, my greatest joy as a boss is to be able to remind people that we podcast and there has never in the history of the world been a podcasting emergency. Like, I'm like I, you know, and I love that everyone I work with, including me, right? Like takes our work seriously, and our work matters.

 **Casper** You're like, yeah, yeah you have high standers.

**Vanessa** And we really believe in having high standards. And then if somebody messes up, I'm like, ‘really? Like, we're fine. Everyone's fine.’ Like this isn’t the Titanic.

**Casper** [00:29:25] It'll come out tomorrow.

**Vanessa** [00:29:26] Right. Like, none of us made big mistakes. No one is dying. We're okay. Yeah. Yeah. And there's just something about. Yeah, those intergenerational friendships or those just slightly removed friendships that actually someone can step in and be like, ‘it's not that serious.’

**Casper** [00:29:42] Yeah. I'm curious. You know, in this question, there is space for realizing that maybe you're not on the right path in a relationship or in a career. Like if after some reflection, someone ends up on the side of like actually, something needs to change. What do we make of this question in that context?

**Vanessa** [00:29:58] No. Thanks for pushing us on that. I mean, this is such dumb, practical advice, but in those moments, I'm a big believer in the informational interview. And just like writing to people in the world who you admire.

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** Even who you don't know, and asking for 20 minutes of their time. Yeah, half of them will say yes and like, be very prepared for those meetings. Come with four questions and then let them go, you know, offer to buy them the cup of coffee. Like really make it easy for them. But talking to people you admire, I think, is just always a great way to brainstorm.

**Casper** [00:30:33] Have you had a conversation like that that's helped shape the direction of your life?

**Vanessa** [00:30:37] Absolutely. In New York, I really did like my days at my job. You know, I loved the people I worked with, and I didn't like my work, you know, like I didn't think it was part of anything big or exciting. And I also didn't enjoy my day to day of the tasks. And but I wasn't unhappy, and I was enjoying my life. So, I didn't have like a huge sense of urgency, which I feel like is the perfect time to make a change.

**Casper** Yes.

**Vanessa** Is when you're like, I'm fine. In the meantime, this isn't a crisis moment. And I would use my lunch breaks to just write to people in New York and like, ask if I could buy them a sandwich or a cup of coffee. And I became good friends with this woman who was the executive director of Feminist Press.

**Casper** Wow.

**Vanessa** And I told her I was like, you know, I wish there was time for more writing in my life. And she was like, Why don't you believe you have something to say? And I was like, There are enough books in the world. And she was like, Yeah, but like, you have a voice that could reach out and help other people, you know, like.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** She just believed in the fact that my voice mattered. And it wasn't about writing a book to me. But that did get me started thinking about divinity school and the fact that the specificity of my voice mattered. Because I think I always hid behind curriculum and other people's visions and missions and was like, I'm happy to help this other thing. And she was just like, ‘No, your point of view could make the world better.’

**Casper** [00:32:00] That's beautiful.

**Vanessa** [00:32:01] She had that huge impact on me. And the other thing was just I just kept asking brilliant women to, like, let me buy them a cup of coffee. And what was amazing is I think almost everyone said yes. And I also realized, like, I took someone who worked in publishing out to coffee, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, that sounds terrible. I don't want to do that at all.’ Right?

**Casper** [00:32:20] Like, oh, half the time those conversations are helpful for knowing what you don't want to do.

**Vanessa** Exactly

**Casper** I mean, that's the value of work experience as well as a young person. I worked at a PR agency, and at an event management company, and in a communications agency for a member of parliament. Like and these were like 1 to 4 weeks of work, like very small little commitments. But yeah, I love that experience of just getting an insight in and being like, ‘Oh, this is interesting but the rest, no.’ or like, ‘wow, a lot of this really fits, but this bit doesn't.’ Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:32:49] And I mean, I even find and this is so hard in COVID, but like hopefully this will reemerge like use a vacation day. To shadow someone for a day. I just really think that if you are curious, just like knock on some doors and see what happens. That's my advice. What about you? If you feel like, ‘Oh gosh, now that I've reflected, this isn't the place for me.’ How do you think about navigating your way out of that?

**Casper** [00:33:17] Yeah, I think the way I've usually figured out at least the next step is by trying something and not in a kind of like, oh, I'm going to change jobs and like get a new job or something like that. But more like, I'm just going to start this little project and see if it feels right. And there are things that I've tried to make in the world that haven't worked out. You know, they never saw the light of day or like it didn't connect with an audience. So it's not that every experiment lands happily, but often the process of making something or trying to figure out, you know, ‘Oh, do I enjoy collaborating with this person that I'm working with’ or ‘have we made something that I'm really proud of? And it felt easy making it to gather’, you know, that those are kind of indicators often of something that works out. And then, you know, sometimes it ends up being an amazing podcast about Harry Potter and then another one about the real question, you know, like that's how those conversations can start. I remember we sat down, you know, for months on end. We would have breakfast together and I was just like, I really like Vanessa. I don't know what the thing is yet, but I'm just going to keep hanging out with her until we figure out something, because I know there's something there. And so, yeah, just like leaning into new relationships, leaning into new experiments or new projects. That's kind of been my strategy. But sometimes that also is exhausting, and I don't always have energy for that. Sometimes I just want to like look at a menu and be like, I will have the tiramisu, you know? Of life.

**Vanessa** [00:34:42] Yeah. I think that that's the thing, right? Is that making these changes is a lot of work.

**Casper** [00:34:47] It is.

**Vanessa** [00:34:47] And so that's why. Right. Like I took a long time to make the change of going to divinity school. If there's a change in my future, it is many, many years from now. The one other thing I want to add, Casper, and I wonder if this resonates with you, is like a willingness to embarrass yourself.

**Casper** [00:35:02] Yeah. You have to be willing to be bad at something again.

**Vanessa** [00:35:05] Yeah. And, like, ask someone for something where they're going to be like, ‘no, that's really inappropriate. You know what? No, you should not just shadowing me for a day. Vanessa, love Barack Obama.’ Right. Like.

**Casper** [00:35:21] Well, you got to reply. I mean, that's better than what I got.

**Vanessa** [00:35:24] And he signed love, which is very nice. Yeah. I'm not going to share the things that I've proposed that have been embarrassing because I'm embarrassed.

**Casper** [00:35:35] But you have to be willing to ask things that are a little unusual or yeah, try something that might not work.

**Vanessa** [00:35:40] Right to someone a little too famous.

**Casper** [00:35:57] So we've got one more question today. Again, it's an anonymous one and it reads, ‘Should I reach out to my ex? We ended on good terms and just needed some space and it's now been two years. And I'm just curious how he is now. Should I reach out to my ex?’ My instinct is yes, this sounds like a good breakup and like that they might actually have a friendship. Like, that's my instinct of like, why not? What could go wrong?

**Vanessa** [00:36:24] So here's my thing. This person says it's based curiosity. If it is really based in curiosity, then you can Google, or find out through mutual friends. So I just kind of want to call B.S. on that. And like, it's possible, there's definitely a certain level of curiosity that, like, you can't Google your way to. But then it's like, what do you actually want? Do you want gossip? Do you want the dish? I would just say that there needs to be a lot of reflection.

**Casper** Yeah

**Vanessa** Because exes are exes for a reason. And I think some people are totally capable of being friends. I just think that there needs to be a lot of intention checking before you do that.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** And if the intentions are pure and you think genuinely that the person will be happy to hear from you, because I think that's the other thing that's like quite a little bomb in your email to get that name popped up.

**Casper** Yep.

**Vanessa** So you just have to realize that you're throwing a bomb and, like, be like, I think this will be a happy bomb. I just think that this needs a lot of thought, which obviously this person is giving it a lot of thought. They wrote into us, right, like this person is on the right path. That's my first instinct.

**Casper** [00:37:32] And it's been two years because I've done this after like three months or after six months and it was too soon. And like, I really hurt that person by writing to them. So when I said, Oh, what's the worst that could happen? Well, bad things can happen because you can just make people feel really awful, you know, especially if you were the one who ended the relationship to then come in and like ask for emotional needs of like, oh, I'm just curious, how you doing? Well, do you actually want to know if they have someone else that they're with now or like, you know what? As you said, like really interrogate what that curiosity is about, but it might be wanting to communicate. You know what? I think back to our time together really fondly, and I appreciated how you, A, B and C or like you really taught me X, Y, Z, that I'm now, you know, it's changed my life in this way. Like, things like that, I think can be beautiful, but the stakes are high. I think, as you said, like you're throwing a bomb into a into an inbox. Yeah. Thinking through what are you pulling people back into? But again, this person saying we ended on good terms, totally hoping that's for both of you, not just the person who's writing them. So it doesn't seem like there's high pain stakes or forgiveness that needs to happen, that kind of thing. I mean, this I feel a little guilty choosing this text, but the text that I'm thinking about in relationship to this conversation is a text message that was sent to me after I went on a date with someone. Now, I do not want to compare a full-on relationship with a single date, but I had signed up for nine dates in seven days. I was determined that I was going to meet, you know, some great person. And I did date number six with Sean, my husband. But that was one of the person who I really wanted to meet because he went to divinity school.

**Vanessa** [00:39:16] I did not know you went on nine dates in seven days!

**Casper** [00:39:19] Yeah, I had a spreadsheet because I had to keep track of everyone's like, username and like who had a brother in Ohio and who had two cats. And, you know, but I met up with this guy called Nick, who is now one of my dearest friends. And we had a lovely first date, a genuinely lovely first date, and I was too chicken to say while we were chatting in person that I actually had already met someone who I was excited about having a second date with. And so I texted him this later. I was like, I'm sorry that I wasn't completely transparent. I have a second date with someone that I'm excited about. Could we be friends? I really like you. And this is what he wrote back and I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but essentially, he said, You know, that's disappointing. I really liked you, too. Can we take a month's space and then meet up again as friends? And I just remember receiving that text message and being like, I have never seen this level of, like emotional maturity, karate skills.

**Vanessa** Yeah.

**Casper** Here is someone who who knows their own needs, who can communicate them and is able to ensure the health of the relationship by taking this break. And so, in this context, you know, someone said it's been two years. I'm wondering if there's any kind of move like that, even if it was in the outreach email of being like, if you don't want to connect, I totally understand. You know, if I don't hear back from you within two weeks, I'll I'll know not to be in touch or, you know, just like to help the person know how to be in touch in a way that will ensure everyone's happiness. And so that's, that's where I'm thinking it's very practical. But I just remember receiving that text message from Nick and being like, ‘Wow’, and we've had Nick on the show. So, look at that.

**Vanessa** [00:41:03] I love Nick. He changed the way I think about evil. Yeah, I am getting more and more wary of outreach. I think it's too easy to reach out to people these days. I had a woman reach out to me because she was dating my ex and wanted information. She thought he was lying to her and, and he was. And I like confirmed that he was lying to her about things, and she kept reaching out. Yeah. And I will say to her credit, I was like, ‘Please stop.’ And she stopped. But it was really disruptive to my life, and she had no idea how disruptive it was to my life. And I'm just thinking more and more when people are like, oh, can I just have 5 minutes of your time? They think that they're asking for something small. But first of all, it's never really 5 minutes, right? And then also if I say no, I'm a bitch, but if I say yes to every 5 minutes, then I have no control over my life.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** And so I just think we all need to be really careful about asking things of people. And so it's the curiosity that I am wary of.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** Because what's fine, I think, is saying, ‘hey, I just want to send you a note and tell you I hope you're well.’ because that's not asking anything of anyone they can respond or not. And like sending well-wishes, like ‘I've been thinking about you and I just want to say, I hope you're doing great.’ Great. But I just think we need to be really careful when we ask things of people. This is coming right after me being like, you know, people you admire and ask them for 20 minutes of their time.

**Casper** [00:42:40] I wanted to ask you about that difference. Yeah. How do you navigate that?

**Vanessa** [00:42:43] They're strangers so they don't owe you anything and they know they don't give you anything. And so they can just be like, ‘sorry, no, now's not a good time.’ And, you know, that's fine. Or just not respond to the email. And I think a line in those emails being like, I totally understand you're really busy. Yeah. And like making sure you mean it and then the person right is important. But when there is a relationship there, I just think that you we need to be careful what we ask from one another. So the text I brought is from ‘Crazy Ex-girlfriend’, one of my all time favorite shows. I'm obviously not saying that this person is a crazy ex. This person sounds like a very thoughtful ex, but this is a TV show that I love, and the premise of the show is that she runs into her ex-boyfriend. And this is I'm not going to keep apologizing. This is obviously a huge extreme and difference from what this person has sent into us. I think that in the hyperbole, there might be something that we can learn. This woman, Rebecca, runs into her ex, Josh, and it's so good to see him. And they run into each other in New York and he's like, Yeah, I'm about to move back to West Covina. It's so great there. I love my life there. And then she moves to West Covina and she clearly moves there because she is in love with him and thinks that they could rekindle the relationship. But what she keeps saying is ‘It happens to be where Josh lives, but that's not why I'm here.’ But she was just like working too hard in New York and she needed to slow down and right. Like, and there was this great justification. She moved there for Josh. And I just think we have to make super sure and not and not just make super sure within ourselves. But like, if that was true, she wouldn't have moved to West Covina. She would have moved to another suburb outside of Los Angeles. Right. And so I think we actually have to make strategic decisions and not just say it. So if you're really just curious, try to Google, try to find out from other people. If you want to send well-wishes then send well-wishes. But I just want us all to be more careful about asking things from one another. Am I being a jerk?

**Casper** [00:44:49] No, I'm really compelled by that. Mostly because I thought I was just reaching out to, like, check in. And it's not been good. And I've hurt people by doing that. So I. I've learned the hard way, and I was ready. Like, I felt right about it. I thought maybe I wasn't even sure. Maybe I did want to was true, but the other person wasn't. And I had no way of intuiting that. And so just kind of imposed what was cool for me onto them.

**Vanessa** [00:45:18] And I have to say, like, I feel like you and I both get a lot of emails on like various levels of the spectrum.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** And like I heard from someone who I went to high school with and I have not spoken to her since high school and I graduated 20 years ago. It was such a nice note. She was like, ‘Hey, I have an intern who loves your podcast. And I was like, Oh my God, I know her. And then I Googled and saw how great you're doing. And that made me so happy. And I just wanted to say like, hi.’ Right. I hadn't thought about this woman in 20 years, but it was like, you know, it was really nice and I didn't feel like I had to respond. And I high school is not a pleasant time for me. So this could have gone really poorly. But because she was so like, it was great to see that you're doing great. Take care. No expectation. Like, she didn't even write no expectations. It was just, like, happy to see you thriving. Take care. And I was like, Oh.

**Casper** [00:46:11] That's so wonderful.

**Vanessa** [00:46:12] It was so nice. So I do think that there are ways and if I had been like, I can't believe she did that. She was mean to me in high school. She just doesn't remember. I kind of just clicked delete.

**Casper** Yeah.

**Vanessa** I think we have to make it easy for other people to click delete.

**Casper** [00:46:24] The frictionless, nice nature of communication and email honestly is the one I feel best about. It's DMS that I find so challenging.

**Vanessa** [00:46:33] Yeah. I mean, Lin-Manuel Miranda was like you DMing me is not. You don't actually have the right to me.

**Casper** [00:46:40] Correct.

**Vanessa** [00:46:41] And I just feel that that's also true about exes. There are people who we have the right to, you know, like I feel like I have the right to you and be like Casper, I need 5 minutes of your time, right? Like, yeah, but I just think we have to remember that we do not have the right to exes. That's what makes them exes. Right.

**Casper** [00:46:59] I love that. It's, it's that you have the right to have relationship. That's the mistake I've made in the past. And I think that's the danger in this question. It's like the reason it's an ex relationship is that you no longer have that kind of claim on someone, and so you can't just reinsert yourself. You have to be as careful and nearly like trepidatious is the word I want to use. Right? Like give all those clauses of, like, ‘no need to respond’ or like ‘I have no expectations’ or, you know, you have to couch so much of what you're saying within that because yeah, you don't have a right to just show up in this person's life, even as you said, just having your name in that inbox. Like unless you really know that could be really upsetting to someone.

**Vanessa** [00:47:41] Yeah. So yeah, just I would be very wary about reaching out to exes. Maybe this person should reach out. Just give it a lot of thought.

**Casper** [00:47:48] We don't claim to give you the best advice, but we do like thinking about your questions. So thank you very much. Anonymous question asker. And we love thinking about your questions, so please keep reaching out. We will probably shape a few more shows in this direction. More on that story later.

**Vanessa** [00:48:05] We would also love to hear from you if you like these episodes everyone. And so please do let us know if you're like, ‘Ooh, these are so fun.’ Or if you're like, ‘Hey, dudes, this isn't what the show is.’

**Casper** [00:48:17] Whether you liked it or not, you have been listening to the real question. We can only make this show thanks to the support of our incredible patron community. So if you have the means to give us a couple of bucks a month, please check out our patron.com/realquestionpod where you can join at various tiers all sorts of little rewards. And if you love the show, please leave a review on iTunes or follow us on Instagram, and Facebook, at realquestionpod and on Twitter at therealqPod and tell your friends, you know, we are the talk of the town in a small town in your neighborhood. You just don't know about it yet.

**Vanessa** [00:48:51] We're a Not Sorry Production. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman. Our music is by the great and talented Nick Bohl we are distributed by Acast. We want to thank Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Molly Baxter, who's editing this week's episode Stephanie Paulsell and all of our patrons.

**Casper** [00:49:05] Thanks, everyone. See you next week.