

[music]

0:00:02.0 Speaker 1: Welcome to the Pop-Up Pod. A new podcast that's similar to a pop-up shop or a pop-up restaurant in that it's sporadic, sometimes it's here and sometimes it's not. Each 12-episode season dives deep into a single question, and our question for season one is this, should I get married? It's a real question I'm asking myself these days. I'm your host, Nicole Antoinette, 36 years old, divorced, close friends with my former spouse, child free by choice, self-employed almost three years into a committed romantic relationship with a guy I love, and I'm genuinely unsure of how I feel about marriage. This uncertainty got me thinking, How do other people really feel about their own relationships? What's working, what's not working, let's find out. 12 episodes, 12 different people, honest conversations about the joys and struggles of long-term romantic relationships. One of those 12 people who you'll get to meet in today's episode is Caroline Zook. Caroline, whose pronouns are she/her is an artist, writer and lover of big feelings. She's also one of my dear friends. Caroline currently co-owns a coaching membership program for intentional online business owners with her husband, Jason, called Wandering Aimfully, which we definitely dig into the pros and cons of working with your spouse.

0:01:21.9 Speaker 1: We talk about a lot of different things in this conversation, the evolution of a relationship, when one person wants to get married and the other person doesn't, how to get your needs met, or more specifically how to ask for what you need when you're not getting it from the other person without trying to change them or make them feel like they aren't enough. We go into that and so much more, but first, we kick it off with a story from Caroline about her husband's farting. [chuckle] You'll see, here we go.

[music]

0:02:00.1 S1: Alright, we are good to go. Caroline, welcome to the show.

0:02:03.3 Caroline Zook: Thanks for having me. I'm so excited.

0:02:05.0 S1: I'm so excited to. What a treat to get to interview a dear friend. I always feel like it's a really funny friendship thing to be like, well, I know some of this stuff, but I actually don't know a lot of the things. This is genuine curiosity, the things that I wanna ask you about today, and I feel like it's such a cool secret weapon for getting closer to your friends, to be like, come on my podcast and tell me all your secrets.

[laughter]

0:02:27.3 CZ: It's so true, everyone in a friendship should just pretend they have a podcast and get to know all the deeper stuff. We both do love the deeper conversation, so I'm like, Oh, this is fantastic.

0:02:37.8 S1: Great. So I just get to take some hours of your time and have you tell me all about your marriage and relationship.

[laughter]

0:02:44.7 CZ: I can't wait to see what comes out.

0:02:46.5 S1: Oh my God. Okay, so here's what I'm gonna ask you first. Will you tell everyone about the fart noise thing that you do with Jason? Jason being your husband, for people who don't understand.

0:02:56.7 CZ: I would love to. Jason is my husband. The basis of our marriage is really just a shared love of bathroom humor, [laughter] but something that... For many years in the early stages of our relationship, I specifically did not fart around Jason. 'Cause I did the thing that you do where society tells you you're a woman and you can't fart, it's bullshit, we know it now, but I was just like, that would be the worst, most embarrassing thing, and then there came a point in our relationship where I think I accidentally farted and it was just the most... Simultaneously the most mortifying and yet most freeing moment of our relationship because I was like, the seal is broken. It's on from here on out. And we still laugh about that moment because I tried to cover it up with opening a cabinet, which was very creaky, and so it was like creak, but it was also a fart sound. And Jason was like, did you just... And I was like, I think I did. And then that was definitely a very important milestone in our relationship, but from that point on, we've really just embraced the farting, not so much so that we're just walking around farting in front of each other, but it's funny, it's just funny, so... I can't help it, one of my favorite bits is Jason will fart and I will try to recreate the sound with him. [laughter] 'Cause you know, you just have such a repertoire.

0:04:22.9 CZ: It's like, is it just a little like... Or is it like a massive... Or is it sometimes just a complete just air fart and you're just like pooh... So that is our game. I realize that that might be totally out of bounds for some people's relationships, and I respect that, for us, it is always a giggle fest and it keeps us laughing. And it is like my favorite game, and there's nothing more satisfying to when we both agree that I absolutely nail it. I have nailed the exact cadence, I've nailed the tone, I have just nailed the exact fart, and it feels like we won the lottery, to mix in.

0:05:04.3 S1: Oh my god. I'm really glad I asked you about this. This is great. For folks listening, something that you and I do, or I guess that I just started doing, you and Jason have a fantastic podcast together, it's one of my favorite shows to listen to. One of the only regular shows that I listen to at this point, and oftentimes I will listen to it and then send you voice note of things that I wanna call my junk, 'cause I'm like, I wanna be in the conversation too with the two of you, so it's like I'd be your little addendum podcast and... I don't remember what it was on the show that you were talking about. But it was definitely about farting, this is a regular topic. It's not a conversation, but that gets mentioned, and I remember that you and I sent some voice notes back and forth about just like you said, the bullshit, the horror of being socialized as someone who's not allowed to fart ever. And what that experience is as a young girl, as a woman, what do you do when you have to poop at someone's apartment for the first time, it was just... We went back and forth, and you use the term fart swallowing? Please explain that for everyone.

0:06:08.3 CZ: I thought you used that. I thought you did.

0:06:10.9 S1: Was it? I think that was yours.

0:06:12.6 CZ: I really feel like you did. Okay, well, one of us definitely came up with this term, and feel free listener to use this in your life. But a fart swallow is a very specific term, that describes someone who has been socialized to not have bodily functions. And everyone knows that feeling of when you have to fart, but you're like, That would be the worst thing possible for me to fart right out, so you just like somehow it gets re-absorbed in your body and you feel so uncomfortable and you have to just keep it in and it's a fart swallow. And like after years of fart swallowing, it just feels nice to be in a relationship where I don't have to swallow every fart... And it's so funny that you bring this up because Jason and I had a conversation the other day where he was like, "Well, I'm just gassier than you are," and I was like, "No, you're not." First of all, no, you're not, stop trying to wear this like a badge of honor and pretend that you just have more bodily functions. I'm a full human being that has a body that works the same as yours, it's just that I have cultivated the skill of fart swallowing over many years, because God forbid, I have a bodily function as a human being. And so I think it's very funny that there are just probably a lot of men running around thinking that women just aren't as gassy, and it's like, "Oh no, sir, we are, but we have not been able to let out those farts for many years."

0:07:39.5 S1: These are generations and centuries of swallowed farts. No wonder why we're so stressed out all the time, 'cause our stomachs are distended with swallowed farts of our ancestors.

0:07:50.3 CZ: Yeah, it's like, fuck the patriarchy, un-swallow your farts. You know what I mean?

[laughter]

0:07:56.7 S1: Okay. So takeaway for everyone who's listening if you listen no further, fuck the patriarchy, un-swallow your farts. Have at it.

0:08:03.9 CZ: I'm making t-shirts. I'm making t-shirts.

0:08:05.6 S1: Oh my god, exciting. I will buy... Make a tank top and I will buy it. So as you just mentioned, you are married to someone named Jason. I was gonna ask you to introduce yourself a little bit in regard to what I'm calling a relationship bio, so think of this as less what do you do and more of who and how do you love. So what would you like to share as your relationship bio-introduction other than permission to fart.

0:08:33.7 CZ: I love that question. I'm Caroline Zook, married to Jason Zook. And in my relationship, I would say I am definitely the feeler of the relationship, I am definitely the one that brings the emotional conversations to the table, who loves to talk about feelings, for those of you who are into the enneagram, I'm an Enneagram 4. I'm an artist, so I sort of bring all of those feelings things. My husband, Jason, is an Enneagram 8. He is a challenger, he is the opposite of conventional, he questions everything, he is a very honest person, a very direct person. And I will

say that as it relates to our relationship, even though I'm much more of the feeler, he has really... Feelings do not come naturally to him, but that is something that has really evolved over the course of our relationship. We've been together for 11 years, we've been together married for four, and so he's really evolved in the feelings department. There was a time where I would say, I'm the feeler and he's the more practical one, but I think we're sort of merging as the years go on and yeah, we work together, so I would say it's very much a partnership that is built on a foundation of really enjoying each other. Being a well-balanced partnership, and we've been working together for eight years now.

0:10:03.0 S1: I love it.

0:10:04.5 CZ: Yeah, that's us.

0:10:05.7 S1: I am interested in kind of like... You described yourself as maybe more of the feeler and he was more of the doer, at least that was how it was at the beginning. I'm curious about what do you think it took to maybe break out of those really defined roles, and/or would you say that either of you have felt resentment about, Okay, well, I guess I have to be the one who does all the feelings stuff or that type of thing, does that make sense?

0:10:34.6 CZ: Oh, absolutely, and actually, I love that question because this is the topic that requires the most communication from both of us, and it's the topic that we come back to all the time, because we are so different, I think naturally in this regard. And if we don't check in often about it, as far as the resentment goes, I could see how that would very easily create a fissure in our relationship. So we kind of have an awareness of that and we check in a lot about it. There's a very fine line between something being like a strength and a skill that you have and that you bring to a partnership, but then also relying too heavily on it and then it creating a resentment. So it's this weird thing where it's like, I don't... I am the feeler, I am the one who is more emotionally attuned, and I bring that to the table in our relationship, and I think it keeps our relationship very healthy. And that's a tremendous strength. And Jason brings this practical aspect where he is so good at supporting me through the emotional journeys that I go through, and he is so good at keeping the trains on time, so to speak, in our relationship, however, it becomes very easy to then fall back on those roles, to fall back on those strengths, and so we have to check in a lot of times and say, Hey... We do it literally on a weekly basis.

0:12:00.9 CZ: I'm like, Hey, I really appreciate so much how you've been supporting me lately in picking up the slack because I'm super sensitive and I'm having to recharge my batteries and all of this, and you've just been really stepping up to the plate. But I just wanna check in and make sure that that is not becoming a source of resentment or that you're not over doing it.

0:12:22.4 CZ: I really have to check in with him about that and then we'll have a conversation about it, and we've been doing that for years. And we will continue to do it probably through our entire relationship, because those are very, I think, un-mutable parts of our personalities. And then to answer the first part of your question about how did we get sort of through that evolution of meeting a little bit more in the middle in terms of that spectrum, because at the beginning of our

relationship... Truly, when I tell you, I was at the end of like, I have the most emotional needs, and which is not a bad thing I'm saying, but I just... I really had a lot of emotional needs. And then him being at the other end of the spectrum of like, I'm not... I have zero emotional needs and I don't need to... I'm sort of a robot. We were really at the opposite ends of the spectrum, and it has taken just a tremendous amount of communication, first and foremost, but also a commitment on both of our parts to do the internal work separately in order to understand why we are that way and to come to start speaking a language that we both could understand when it comes to emotions and feelings.

0:13:31.5 S1: Have you ever worked with a therapist together about it?

0:13:34.2 CZ: We've never done therapy together, although we check in about it, probably once a year, we are like... If there's a topic of discussion that we come back to time and time again, we sort of check in and we're like, alright, is it time to really bring in a third party on this because we just seem to be at a stalemate on this one issue, whatever that might be. But something that I have seen as a tremendous benefit of personal therapy... Again, this goes back to the conversation about strengths, so my strength is that I am willing to wait into uncomfortable conversations or self-development work. So I've been doing therapy for many many years, and I have an amazing therapist, and the beautiful part about doing therapy solo is that... We share one car, so a lot of times, Jason, back when we were doing in-person therapy, he would drop me off in my therapy sessions, I would come out and we would usually go out to lunch after. And I would tell him, here's what we worked through, here are my enlightening moments from it, and so it's almost like I was taking him along on my personal journey, but it was teaching him things about himself at the same time, and so much of the therapy work that I have done has trickled over into things that I've seen him evolve into, which is beautiful.

0:14:47.9 S1: That's very, very relatable for me in my partnership too, that it's... I think about not just therapy, but any sort of personal growth type work, I'm just really oriented that way to seek that out, I find that really interesting, and so things that I'm reading or a podcast that I'm listening to. Or something like therapy or coaching, all of which I have used throughout the years. That to be able to then bring that to him and say, hey, I heard about this, or I learned about this, what do you think about this? And I think as long as I'm willing to take the lead on it and not expect him to take it... Not expect him to be the way that I am... We've had a lot of conversations about... In regard to this specifically, that things don't have to be equal, in order to be fair. It's not like we each have to bring up three and a half growth-related conversations per month in order for it to feel equitable, there's plenty of things that he does more naturally, that I don't... That as long as it... I feel like he's willing to meet me in these conversations, that feels satisfying to me.

0:15:53.3 CZ: Absolutely, and two things there that I wanna touch on are that going back to the resentment conversation, that's also a place where I really have to check in because if I am always bringing that to the table... There have been times where I have been honest with him and been like, I really feel like I'm carrying the emotional weight here. And I'm feeling myself get a little bit exhausted of being the one all the time, and one thing I have to say about Jason, and I don't know how I got so lucky to pick him, but he takes feedback really well, and he's very action-oriented. So when I bring things up to him and I'll say, Hey, I'm noticing this, he really takes it and tries to apply

it and I can see the effort in the way that he approaches conversations going forward, so if I do that same check in where I check in with him about the doing, I check in with myself about the emotional load. And if I'm honest about the fact that I do feel like I'm caring too much of it, he will make more of an effort to take the lead in some of those things or have the hard conversations. He will do that. And I forgot the second part of what I was gonna bring up, but that's okay.

0:17:05.4 S1: Maybe it'll come back, maybe it won't. Tell me why you decided to get married?

0:17:11.3 CZ: That's a lot of questions in there. [laughter] Why we decided to get married? It's interesting because why we decided to get married is a different answer than why we decided to be together.

0:17:28.6 S1: Okay, I want both. Give me both. Yeah.

0:17:30.4 CZ: Yeah. And so I think sometimes they're the same question for maybe a lot of people and for us, it was very different. So a couple, I would say, probably two or three years into our relationship together, it became clear that this was my person, this was gonna be my committed partnership. And I thought that that meant, this will be the person I marry. And it became very clear that Jason didn't wanna get married, and this was something that we had to have many, many conversations about over many, many years, so we got married seven years into our relationship, and why we finally made that decision... It's just so many different factors leading up to that over the course of seven years, it's not just one thing. So the most urgent catalyst was actually pretty practical, I think... We can't even remember, I asked him this before we got on, and we both can't remember the... There was some type of paperwork catalyst to getting married.

0:18:33.0 CZ: Because I won't get into it, but he had done a lot of changing of his last name over the course of many years, so he finally had landed on this last name of his that I had actually kind of chosen with him, it's his great-grandfather's last name, so he had... His mom got divorced many times, he had these last names that he wasn't really connected to, he sold his last name a couple of times, which again is a story for a different day. So finally he was choosing this last name that he was gonna carry forward for the rest of his life. And it was interesting to me that he would check in with me about that, like, hey, do you think this last name... It's my great-grandfather's. Do you like it? And I thought that was very interesting because up into that point, we were sort of under the... We had reached this conclusion that we were just weren't gonna get married and that was gonna be fine, and I was like, Well, why would he even ask me about this last name if we weren't gonna get married, but okay.

0:19:18.2 CZ: And so I sort of got to choose Zook as this last name from his great grandfather, and there's something there we both can't remember about wanting to do paperwork or maybe it was insurance or something, and... I'll never forget, we were on the plane. We were on a plane coming back from Florida where both of our families live for Christmas, and so it was around New Years and we were flying and we were talking about this paperwork thing, and it sort of came out of his mouth, he was like, well, maybe... Maybe we should just go ahead and change your name too, and I was like, okay. And so then I'm like, Did he just sort of suggest what I think he suggested, and then

we land and we're waiting in the line for the Uber to go ride home from the airport. And he turns to me and he's like, Yeah, I think we should just go ahead and get married. And then we can change your last name, and I was like, okay, mm-hmm, and I was like, wait, did you just propose to me in the line for an Uber?

[laughter]

0:20:20.7 CZ: And he was like, Oh, was that the wrong way to do that? And we... I sort of just was quiet the whole way home, not even like a shock or anything, but just sort of quietly contemplating like... And this is the thing you have to understand about Jason is... And our relationship in general, it's very much like years of conversating and then it's like a decision is made. That is how he operates. I know. I know it now. And so it's sort of like, wait, wait, wait, and then go. That's just how decision making is, and so I wasn't that surprised, but I was sort of... It took me the entire ride home to process that, okay, now we are getting married, and things started to move forward from there, which we can talk about... We opted to elope, we could talk about all of that, but the answer to why we finally got married was just we were both ready to make that further commitment and... Yeah, I don't know the answer other than we just were excited. We knew for sure that we wanted to be together, and we kind of got married for a super practical reason.

0:21:31.3 S1: Engagement in line for the Uber. That's a fantastic story, I'm very glad [0:21:36.8] . So you mentioned a couple of years in that you had thought, Okay, this is the person that I'm gonna marry, and then finding out through conversations that he wasn't interested in marriage. How did that feel for you?

0:21:50.1 CZ: Yeah, really hard at first. Really hard to understand at first. So also something to note, going into our relationship, I was... When we met, I was 21 years old, Jason was 27 years old, and he's very much a rule breaker, I'm very much... Well, used to be very much a rule follower. So at the beginning of our relationship, again, talking about the spectrum, I'm really emotional, he's really not. These are over generalizations, but it gives you an idea of where we're oriented and where we're coming from. So in the early days, I definitely had this more traditional idea that most of us do of... I'm going to be in this relationship, it's going to lead to an engagement, it's going to lead to a wedding, it's going to lead to a marriage, the steps, so to speak. Jason being who he is, never wants to do anything the traditional way, he questions everything that society feeds us. He very much does not do well with the answer of, this is the way it's always been done. So this is the way it should be done. Does not like that at all. But when early on, it became clear to me that he was saying, I don't think I ever wanna be married, that was really hard.

0:23:04.7 CZ: I'll also say it was really hard because... So I have very different feelings about divorce now, sitting as a 33-year-old woman than I do, that I did as a 21-year-old woman. I came from a family whose parents did get divorced. My parents got divorced when I was nine months old. My mom remarried when I was three, but there was a lot... Divorce carries this different weight because of the childhood that I had. Now, me as the 33-year-old woman, I believe divorce can be a beautiful, wonderful thing and a very necessary thing for a lot of people, but as a 21-year-old, I had this idea of what that meant, and I had decided I wanted to avoid that. And so marriage held this

very weighty thing for me of... It was a little bit like a chip on my shoulder of like, I'm gonna do it differently than my parents did it kind of thing. Right. And so marriage was my way of rewriting my childhood in a way, I think.

0:24:00.4 CZ: So it carried all this stuff, and then for Jason, it's very interesting because he came from a very similar background with divorce. However, he took that and instead of saying like, oh, I wanna do it differently, and so I really care about marriage, he was just sort of like, oh, I just don't ever wanna get married 'cause it's very indicative of our personalities, I'm like, Let me just dive into it and figure it out and do it differently and evolve, and he was just like, Let me avoid. Let me just not even touch it, let me just completely write my own rules around it. And so early on in our relationship, it was a constant source of friction, it was... We found ourselves running in these circles where he would say, well, it just doesn't matter to me. Why does it matter? Can't we just be together? And then I would sort of counter with, well, if it doesn't matter, then why don't we just do it.

[laughter]

0:24:50.5 CZ: And so I don't know if anyone listening can relate to that merry-go-round that you do constantly, but it was very much this stalemate, and it wasn't until... We did that for a couple of years where we just would find ourselves in this same argument over and over again, about trying to get the other person to see our way. And it wasn't until I think I started to go, okay, this isn't working. Trying to get him to my point of view. Why don't I really invest some time in trying to see it from his of view? Let me just have... Let me approach it with curiosity. Let me ask myself, what would it look like if we were just together and didn't get married. And just that little tiny bit of curiosity of trying to... Instead of trying to drag him over to my side, it was sort of like, Let me just tip it over to his side for a second and just see how it feels and what it would be like. And the funny part is, and I think this happens a lot in life, the moment that I sort of loosened the reins and said, you know, I'm just not gonna fight this battle anymore, I'm gonna approach it with more curiosity, we're not in any rush, we can have conversations around this. If this is truly my person, we've got our entire lives to have this fight.

[laughter]

0:26:06.1 CZ: So I just sort of took my foot off the gas a little bit, and in that curiosity, I found all of these new possibilities for what a commitment could look like. And the irony is that through years of loosening those reins and having those conversations from a much more open curious place, of course, he then comes around and wants to get married for these practical reasons. Which I'm not saying like play games or try to somehow manipulate the situation. But I do find that there's a tremendous amount of irony, and the moment you stop trying to force it is when... If you can be the one to add a little bit of curiosity and openness, your partner might just meet you with that level of curiosity and openness too, and you might arrive at the place ultimately that you wanna be anyway.

0:26:55.0 S1: Yeah, that's such good advice. Do you feel, for you personally, that you would have

had... I don't even know if fulfillment is the right word, but if you hadn't gotten married, do you think that that would have been fulfilling for you, or do you think you would have held on to this little like, oh man, I wish or I'm still kind of trying to convince him sometimes. Do you think that you would have been totally okay with it?

0:27:17.5 CZ: Yeah, that's just such a hard and interesting question because my first instinct when he said that was I totally, absolutely could have found fulfillment because I had really made peace with it, honestly. By the time that he proposed in the Uber line, I really had made peace with this idea of we're going to be in a long-term committed partnership without the label or the legal documents of marriage. And I had really come to be at peace with that, so my first instinct is to say, yes, I totally could have found fulfillment. However, I will say, being on the inside of it, I don't know, there is this... It's just hard for me to say because I do find such deep satisfaction in knowing... I don't know, in saying that Jason is my husband, there is something... And maybe it's just language, it could just be the label, in which case, you don't need a piece of paper in order to decide what your label is. So I really don't know the answer to that question, but I will say regardless of how, which side of that decision we had come down on, I think that I would have found equal satisfaction because I found the person that leaves me feeling satisfied in a relationship, if that makes sense.

0:28:33.0 S1: Yeah, that totally makes sense. So you've said you've used that phrase a couple of times, my person. I'm interested how you feel, and maybe how you feel about that now is different from when you two met, when you were 21, but how you feel about the idea of finding the one in quotes or the phrase, when you know, you know.

0:28:52.8 CZ: Yes. I'm so glad you asked this question because this was something that really fucked with my head when we first got together. We had a really weird and tumultuous beginning to our relationship. So, for some back story, some juicy tea if you want, when we met, it was 2010. I was just graduating college, and we were both in relationships, other relationships, and we had met through this... It was kind of serendipity, this coincidence, where I had... I was the president of our advertising club in college. I got him to be a speaker because he had this marketing, interesting marketing job at the time, so we met through that. And there was just this instant like humor and chemistry between us, and I thought to myself, oh, this is a really cool guy, we really get along, we'll be friends, maybe he can help kind of... He's very interesting. He's very creative. I was very much in this place at the time of figuring out what I wanted my career to be after college, so I was really finding reasons to continue to talk to him about where my career could go after. Now, it became very clear within about a month of us being friends that it was tiptoeing into territory that felt like emotional cheating to me. It felt like, oh, this is not just like a friend, this is like I have...

0:30:11.5 CZ: I'm developing feelings for this person, and that made me uncomfortable because it became clear that the relationship I was in at the time was not gonna be the relationship, which I thought it was at the time. And so I sort of came to Jason and I said... I broke up with my boyfriend. The long short of it is I broke up with my current boyfriend, and this is a lot to throw on a person. He had been dating someone for four years. I said, hey, I don't expect anything from you, but I think there's something between us. It's made me see that I... What is out there, and I just know that the

relationship I'm in currently doesn't have that spark, and I now know that I want to go find that spark. So whether it's with you or someone else, I just want you to know I broke up with my boyfriend and this is the decision I've made, not knowing that he would, you know, what he would do with that. And he was kind of like, thank you for letting me know. And I was like, oh shit.

[laughter]

0:31:10.8 S1: I talked a big game about being fun. Well, either way, but dammit. And then the day after, maybe it was the same day, he was like, Yeah, I feel the same way and I'm gonna end things with my current girlfriend as well. And we were like, What the hell are we doing? So to make things even more complicated, I had accepted a job in the city as my college boyfriend. So my first job out of college was in the city of the guy that I just broke up with. And so Jason and I decided to date for six months, long distance right away. It was a very crazy mixed up wild time for me personally, and everyone in my life thought I was absolutely off my rocker. But I had this indescribable feeling that the chemistry that I had with Jason was something that doesn't come around very often, and I just trusted my intuition on that. Now, I make this big decision, I blow up my life to date this guy who's six years older than me, and long distance and we're both... It's all very stable things to start a relationship off of breaking up with other people, and then I started to feel... I had this knowing that this relationship was potentially something that could be long-lasting, but I remember this voice in my head saying, when you know, you know.

0:32:35.2 CZ: So it's like my intuition, my gut was telling me this person is my person, but everything from society and everything I'd heard was when people say that, right, they say, when you know you've met the one you just know. And I was like, but I don't know. I was like, Actually, we're fighting a lot about the fact that I have these emotional needs that he can't seem to meet, and we don't speak the same language, and there's all these things in our relationship that need work, and there's this little core part of chemistry and commitment and desire, that is so real and so unlike anything I've ever experienced. But everything else seems like it's super shaky and cloudy, and so I almost talked myself out of it. I was like, oh, this can't be it 'cause it's not perfect. And I do think we put this expectation on relationships, especially for young people who may be at my age at 21, think they are supposed... If they're in that stage where they're in search of their partner and actively searching for their partner, which you don't have to be in your early 20s to be doing that. But there's this pressure of like, Oh, if it isn't perfectly right in every aspect, keep looking 'cause you'll find it, you know.

0:33:57.5 S1: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah, I've thought about this a lot, I mean obviously, I've been divorced, so there's another layer of that for me, but I really don't believe in this idea that there's one person for everyone, or that there is like the one. I think there's plenty... If you are choosing partnership, I think there's plenty of people that each person could be happy with. It's like just having enough of the... I think about two different people meeting in the middle, and there's a Venn diagram that it's... They don't have to have all of the things, but you have to have enough overlap that it meets the needs that you want that relationship to meet, and then... I don't know. I feel like sometimes this type of stuff is hard to talk about because there obviously is an X-factor. There is some unexplained or unexplainable aspects to it, but yeah, I don't know, I just don't think that that

idea that there's like the one... Something about that also, like you said, it feels too pressury and it also makes me kind of sad 'cause what, like out of the billions of people in the world, if you don't meet your one and you're destined not to be happy. That's way tragic.

0:35:03.9 CZ: Totally. Totally, yeah, I've never subscribed to the belief of the one, so I think even when people would tell me that, I was like, Oh like, a one. Like my one or two or three, who cares, but I think you're absolutely right. I think, it's too much pressure. I think... And it kind of goes back to that idea I was talking about of, if you know, you know, which is, it pre-supposes that you're gonna link up with someone and you're gonna fit two magical puzzle pieces, when really it almost never happens that way. It's like there's parts of you that have this, like you were describing like a Venn diagram, there's parts of you that are somehow attracted like a magnet, but you got all these other jaggedy edges around that do not fit like puzzle pieces, and you have decide. You have to make an active choice that both of you feel that the magnet part is strong enough and valuable enough to work around the other jaggedy edges and to figure out, Are they moldable? Are they not moldable?

0:36:05.0 CZ: Could they be molded into puzzle pieces that could fit together? And I think that active choice part of it is so much a part of why Jason and I have... Our relationship has lasted this long is... We figured out fairly early on that even though all those other bits didn't necessarily fit perfect puzzle pieces, there was such a willingness and a commitment to mold and shape things in such a way that we could build a beautiful life together.

0:36:34.6 S1: Yeah, that's really well said. So my partner and I met hiking the PCT, the Pacific Crest Trail, and so I'm just giving a little bit of back story for people listening. So one of the things that's part of long distance trail culture, if folks don't know, is that often times you will get a trail name, it's like either something silly you do or something that happens where other hikers give you a trail name that you can either take or not take. And it's kind of like your nickname, your alter ego like there's plenty of people that I don't know their real names, I only know their trail names that I've met over the years. So his real name is Tom, my partner, his trail name is Gentleman or Gent for short. And because we met on trail, we know each other by our trail names, and so we off-trail still call each other by our trail names, so all of that to say, Gent. He's eight years younger than me, and when we started dating, it was a real reckoning moment for me of all of the things... Not all of the things, but a lot of the things that I had thought that I wanted in a partner, and this was very soon after I got divorced, so there was also for me that emotional space, is it even too soon to be in a new relationship, there's that whole thing.

0:37:41.0 S1: Which it sounds like you also had that as well. But if I would have set out to meet someone on purpose... I've never done the dating app thing... It just never really worked out that way. But if I would have, the thought of what would I have put my age brackets on. Or what are the things... Like what I thought that I was looking for and things that I had chosen that were really consistent in all previous partners or in mostly all previous partners were so different from who... This man in front of me was.

0:38:13.4 S1: And I was like, "It's so interesting that I would have never sought him out." Or we

would have never met through those channels, because I would have never thought that I was gonna be with someone who was eight years younger. And there were just a couple of other things too that didn't match the picture in my mind of what I thought... If we're gonna use the one or my person or that type of stuff... That I wouldn't have thought.

0:38:34.4 S1: And would actually have thought that the opposite would have been true. And then to find... At least for this phase of my life that this is such an absolutely incredible fit was really eye-opening for me and helped me to just loosen control in other areas of my life too. Of like, it's fine to want stuff and to be really clear, but it's cute that I think that I know exactly what's best for me, and I don't always. Right? And so, there was...

0:38:57.8 CZ: So true.

0:38:58.5 S1: Something in that, that was a very good lesson for me.

0:39:00.6 CZ: Oh, so true. I think it's very... Just speaking to what you said, funny as well, that the person that I was with, right before I met Jason... And this is no disrespect to him or anything about him. He's a wonderful person. But the life that I would have had had I gone down that path is very different than the life I have now.

0:39:28.5 CZ: That was a path that would have been extremely traditional. It would have been extremely predictable. And those are wonderful things for certain people who want to choose that. The irony... And also, I shared with you, I was very much a rule follower. So it made sense to me... And there was this beautiful back story. His mom and my dad had gone to law school together. So there was this family connection, this whole mythology I had built up in my head about us ending up together.

0:39:53.6 CZ: And yet here comes this curve ball, who is totally irreverent, non-traditionalist, has a job that is just the weirdest thing I'd ever heard, six years older... All of these things that I had never thought for myself that were a little scary because it was choosing a path of a lot of uncertainty. But the life that I have now, and the person that I have grown into, and the authenticity that I get to bring to everything that I do...

0:40:26.9 CZ: I oftentimes will say the luckiest thing that ever happened to me was meeting to Jason... I try not to put that much credit in his column because... I don't wanna get his ego too big. But truly... He changed my life. He changed the direction of my life, and I get to be this person because I happened to meet this partner and be open to this partnership that was unlike anything I had ever predicted for myself.

0:40:53.5 S1: Why did you guys choose to elope?

0:40:56.7 CZ: Well, that's an easier question, because we both... Really hated the idea of having a wedding.

0:41:04.5 S1: And that's... My former spouse and I eloped too for the same thing... When I actually thought about everything that that entailed... Or... And maybe I wasn't giving it enough credit. I know people who have had such cool weddings that really do represent them as a couple and their interest, and their family... There's just... What I thought a wedding had to be... The whole thing to me just sounded so stressful and so expensive, and I did not wanna do it.

0:41:32.6 CZ: Yeah, I... Same. And for me, it actually was a lot about knowing myself, and knowing... A huge area of growth for me has been... I'm someone who deals with anxiety, and I can very much get in my head about feeling responsible for other people's experiences of things. And that's something that I have to work on is reminding myself, I'm not responsible for how other people experience the world. But a wedding sounded like the absolute worst case scenario for someone who tries to manage other people's experiences, because I was like... I can imagine this day where even if we manage to plan it where it was beautiful and perfectly represented us knowing myself and knowing that all I would be doing that day is thinking like, "Is my mom I'm having a good time?" "Are my mom and my dad getting along?" "Are they talking enough to Jason's... "

0:42:22.2 CZ: You know what I mean... The managing of that where it would be... And what I wanted was to focus on our marriage. What I wanted was to focus on our partnership and the choice that we were making... And our theme for our elopement was practical love. That was our mantra. And I think going back to the conversation I had about the Uber and the changing of the name and everything. And so... But it became this beautiful metaphor for just the way that we view our relationship, which is unique to the way that oftentimes relationships are portrayed as this romantic over the top thing. And I think that's beautiful. And I think if that is the way that your relationship looks then that's wonderful.

0:43:03.9 CZ: But for us, it was this... There is beauty and romance in the every day mundane. There's beauty and romance in the fact that we got married on a Tuesday. You know what I mean? I just... I love that... Because that's how we live our lives. And I guess it goes back to your ultimate question, which is, would we feel satisfied. And I think I now can confidently say... 20 minutes later... Yeah, I would... Because our lives didn't change that much. You know?

0:43:31.6 S1: Yeah. Were your families... Either of your families or both of your families disappointed with your choice not to have a more traditional wedding?

0:43:39.0 CZ: You know if they were they didn't show it, which I really appreciate. Luckily, the beauty of waiting for seven years after being together to get married is I think they honestly thought we never would get married. So it was a genuine shock to them that we were opting to get married. So I think they had sort of already made peace with the grief of, I'm not gonna go to this wedding. And so we told them our idea for it. I do think what soften the blow a little bit is that we did decide... So we got married in March of 2017, in just a... Our own ceremony overlooking these cliffs in San Diego. And we just got dressed up, we had a photographer, a videographer, and that was it. And then we drunk tequila, and ate donuts and it was great. We did exchange vows, I think... And rings. That was the most traditional thing we did. But about... I can't remember how long after that... Maybe a few weeks, we planned a family trip with Jason's family, to Ashville, North

Carolina.

0:44:36.5 CZ: So we all met there and rented a house. And then my mom, step-dad, and dad all drove up from Florida. And so we rented a nice kind of... A private room at a restaurant, and we had a big dinner with both families. And that, I think helped soften the blow because at least our parents had some type of ritual that could make them feel like we marked the occasion. It was special for them. You know?

0:45:03.2 S1: Yeah, we did exactly the same thing.

0:45:04.7 S1: Oh really.

0:45:06.2 CZ: With both of our parents. Yeah... And showed them our wedding video, that kind of thing. Yeah, but I will say my parents, particularly my mom was and always is incredibly supportive, but was definitely disappointed. She respected that that was the choice that I was making, but she wished that I would have made a different choice... You know...

0:45:25.3 CZ: Yep, yep.

0:45:26.1 S1: Which is fair.

0:45:28.3 CZ: Yeah, I think life... That is the challenge of life, at least in my aspect, is just a constant choice between honoring yourself and your wishes knowing it will disappoint your parents and choosing that anyway.

0:45:44.3 S1: Whoof... I feel like that's a different podcast.

0:45:47.8 CZ: So true.

0:45:49.4 S1: So you mentioned that a couple of times over the years, you had what you called stalemate issues. It sounds like marriage was one of them. What about the decision whether or not to have kids. Was that a stalemate? Or has that... Or is that a stalemate issue?

0:46:01.1 CZ: It's so interesting because kids has unfolded... I would say in some ways, very similarly to the marriage conversation in terms of what I described to of the years of conversations, and then all of a sudden, yes. And so I made it really clear early on that kids was something that I knew I wanted, but I will say that I did at least... What I learned from the marriage conversation was that I at least had to entertain and approach that decision with the same openness and curiosity that I did the marriage conversation.

0:46:36.8 CZ: So even though I knew I wanted kids, I allowed myself to try on the shoes of what if I decided that we never would have kids. I allowed myself that space to live out that reality, to see how it felt. So that I could really suss out, is this something that I think I'm supposed to do? Or is this something that I really want? And I gave myself plenty of time to do that. And I sort of checked

in with Jason a lot along the way. And I think that was crucial actually, because he was sort of ambivalent. He was like, "I could be perfectly happy not having kids, but if this is something that you want, I will."

0:47:10.8 CZ: But he was very resistant to right now... Like, he was, "Like sometime in the future," kind of thing. But I think by checking in with him every step along the way and saying, "Hey, just so you know... I do think about what it would be like if we chose not to." And I want you to know that I'm actively pursuing that line of thought so that you know, I'm not just imposing this upon you because I think it's something that we should do. And I think he really appreciated that.

0:47:37.0 CZ: Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that it is something that I very deeply want and I can feel that desire in a deep, deep place. However, we've been talking about it for... Really talking about it for five years and it's been in this conversation where sometimes the conversation has ended in tears. Not necessarily because I was ready, which I wasn't, but he was using language and making things very clear that he very much wasn't ready. And it would always end in this conversation where I felt like, is this something that you actually want.

0:48:18.7 CZ: It never felt like he was coming to the table with that type of openness. But I will say that because we had those conversations earlier rather than later, it has given us years to kind of inch towards this place where...

0:48:33.3 S1: Now, the way that he talks about it is very different. It's less of a, "Oh, one day," and more of a, "Okay, when we decide to do this." Which I think will probably be in the next two years or so. But yeah... We give lots of time and lots of space for these types of decisions, because I know that the way that it happens is we gotta talk about it for years, and then one day he's gonna be like, "Alright, you're ready to go. Let's put a bun in the oven." And I'm gonna be, "Excuse me. Excuse me."

0:49:00.9 S1: You're gonna be in line for an Uber, and he's gonna be, "Take your pants off Caroline. Let's go."

0:49:04.2 CZ: That's so true. So true. I would not put it past him.

0:49:06.0 S1: Oh my God... Other than potentially having years of conversations, is there anything else that you wanna speak to about this idea of figuring out your own timeline for these kinds of decisions and not letting yourself be rushed by forces outside of your relationship?

0:49:22.2 CZ: Yeah... Yeah, I think that's the thing is you constantly... At least I constantly had to check in with myself, just like I described with the kids thing and ask myself, "Is this something that I'm feeling moved to do because I think it's what I should do, or is it something that I really want." So especially... Less with the marriage thing, because I had sort of already come to terms with like... My friends are getting married, that's not... They were getting married and having weddings, and that wasn't something... The wedding wasn't something I really wanted anyway, so I didn't feel particularly pressured by that aspect of it.

0:49:55.6 CZ: But I will say now that my friends are having kids and it is something that I deeply want, it can start to feel sometimes like that time element to things... That pressure element to things is building up a little bit. And it just takes a mindfulness. It just takes a remembering that every relationship, and every life is on its own time frame, and its own journey. We're not in these racing lanes next to one another, trying to reach these same milestones at the same rate. We're just not. And all I can say is that it's a constant... Letting my mind wonder and feel that pressure because it's inevitable, and then having the mindfulness to pull it back and remind myself... This is why... This is our relationship. The most important thing to me is that my mental health is in a place where it's as strong as possible in order to bring new life into the world.

0:50:51.3 CZ: That our financial position is as strong as possible to bring... People say you're never ready, and I believe that. You can never really be ready, but you can be ready-er. You can be in a place where you feel comfortable to wait into the unknown. And... So yeah, it's just a constant re-calibration, and the mindfulness and reminding myself of why we chose the pace that we chose.

0:51:14.6 S1: Yeah, this idea and this reminder that we don't, whether it's with our relationships or our careers or anything... We don't have to be on other people's timeline... Just because someone else is doing something in a certain time frame or in a certain way, or in a certain order, it's just like... It's such a tender human thing... At least, that's how it feels for me to wanna measure up. Or to wanna match up, or to take cues off of other people.

0:51:37.8 S1: And it's like this self-compassion that I have to have to be like... It's so sweet that that's what you want, and that you wanna feel like you're doing it right, and that you wanna feel like you're not too late or that you're not falling behind. And also your timeline is probably gonna be different from someone else's timeline, and that... What if that was fine.

0:51:57.8 CZ: Absolutely. And I do think there are some very real considerations, not having to do with comparison. So one thing I have thought about is when we have kids, it'll be much later than a lot of my close girlfriends and less around the comparison, but more around just the experience. It will be a lonelier experience of going through that without people who are doing it at the same time.

0:52:23.7 CZ: However, when I weigh that... That reality against the idea of doing it way earlier so that I'm... So that I have people who are going through it with me... But if that means that doing it earlier also means that my partner isn't fully onboard or that my partner feels rushed or my partner feels like their needs weren't honored in this very big life decision... To me, that's not a sacrifice I'm willing to make.

0:52:50.4 CZ: If it means that we have to wait and I have to freeze my eggs... Or we have to do... I will do that because that's just... You have to know your own values... And my value is that Jason and I are a team, and everything else falls away, and the most important thing is that as a team, we're both entering into that phase on equal footing... Both feeling heard and honored in that decision that we're making. So if I gotta just be pregnant by myself, I'll be pregnant myself.

0:53:18.5 S1: Well, I guarantee you statistically, there will be other people pregnant at the time that you're pregnant.

0:53:23.0 CZ: In the world.

0:53:24.5 S1: And I volunteer to be your matchmaker friend, that we will find you... We will find you some other pregnant people to be friends with at that time.

0:53:29.6 CZ: Thank you. What a relief. Wow, what a relief.

0:53:34.9 S1: Oh my God. There you go. Other people who are potentially gonna be pregnant in the future, feel free to reach out to Caroline. I don't know if I've ever asked you this before, and it's fine if you don't wanna talk about it or don't feel like you have an answer that you wanna share. Why do you want kids? And I ask that as someone who very much doesn't, but I don't know that you and I have ever talked about that in depth before.

0:53:56.6 CZ: Yeah. You know, I've thought about this... I don't know if this answer is gonna make sense 'cause I haven't tried to articulate it at all. But the thing that comes to mind first is, as someone who is just so deeply in love with the human experience... I've talked about my... I just love feelings. I love being human. It's hard sometimes, but I just... I love digging deeper and deeper and deeper into this wild existential thing that we're all doing.

0:54:26.2 CZ: And as someone who loves that experience and everything in and around it, I can't imagine depriving myself of an experience that would allow me to meet this person who is a part of me, and yet they're completely their own spirit and soul. And so it's just an experience of... Bringing life in to the world, sounds weird. But I guess that's part of it. Part of it is also feeling like all of these lessons and things that I've picked up along the way, I want to help guide someone using all of that wisdom. I think the idea of parenting makes me excited. And also as cheesy as it sounds, the idea of meeting a person who is part me and part my partner is really exciting to me. Yeah, I just love that.

0:55:20.8 CZ: So... And those are the things that come to mind.

0:55:20.9 S1: That's a really sweet answer. Not that there's like such a thing as good or a bad answer, or a right, or wrong answer to that question.

0:55:25.9 CZ: No... Yeah.

0:55:26.4 S1: But that's a real sweet answer.

0:55:29.1 CZ: Well, thanks. It's... I'm sure there's a... A million more reasons, but yeah, I have thought about it, and again, I don't know if that made any sense, but it's just what came to mind.

0:55:37.8 S1: No, it made so much sense. I also think that this is a topic that's so deep and so

emotional and has so much cultural and familial layering to it and expectations that it really can be hard to parse out what your actual answer is, or even to put it into words. Because I've obviously been asked, sort of the reverse of that question by other people is why don't you want kids.

0:55:58.8 S1: And I feel like it's... I can come up with understandable and logical sounding reasons that are all true, but I feel like the truest reason is just because I don't want to... And...

0:56:14.4 CZ: Exactly.

0:56:14.8 S1: Going back to the beginning of the conversation of like, we've been raised as female fart swallow-ers... Which is like... There also is something of like... I was... And I don't wanna say I was raised this way, like I was taught this. But there was definitely implicit messaging that because I want to or because I don't want is not enough of a reason. That's not a full sentence. I had to have justifications, other people had to be pleased with it, it had to sort of meet the status quo. And so the fact that for me, I do not want to... That.

0:56:43.0 S1: That feels like a really powerful reason, and I almost feel like the reverse is true for you, like this is something that you want, that's reason enough and... I don't know. There's something in that that feels powerful to me.

0:56:52.9 CZ: Absolutely. And I definitely am not one of those people that believes that our purpose on this Earth is to bring children into the world. I don't believe that. I believe that there is potential everywhere, and I believe that you honoring your desire not to have children is equally as beautiful as someone choosing to bring a person into the world. That's you honoring your person-ness, and I think that that's really wonderful.

0:57:24.3 S1: Yeah, thank you. So pivoting a little bit, earlier this week, you emailed me a question or rather a topic for us to chat about that I loved. You said, "How do you ask for what you need when you're not getting it from the other person without trying to change them or make them feel like not enough?" which, first of all, is such a good question, I'm gonna read it again. "How do you ask for what you need when you're not getting it from the other person without trying to change them or make them feel like not enough?" Tell me why you wanna talk about that.

0:57:57.6 CZ: Oh my God. Do we have another hour? [chuckle]

0:58:00.5 S1: I know, right? Or rather, maybe it's easier to start where in your own relationship does that question come from?

0:58:03.0 CZ: Does that show up. Yeah, I mean, the whole thing, probably the whole thing. [laughter] But to go back to an easy way to lead into it because of the context you've already set forth in this conversation, so let's rewind back to the beginning of our relationship. And I am this emotional person who wants to talk about feelings and wants to feel affection, and Jason is this person who, that does not come naturally to him, he does not want to talk about feelings, he doesn't love showing affection. And so I found it really hard to... And by the way, this hasn't gotten easier

11 years later. How do I witness in myself the recognition that I am not getting something that I feel like I need, which is, let's just call it affection and emotional intimacy? Let's just call it that. I'm not getting that. How do I bring that up with my partner and say I'm not getting this without, this is the empathetic part of my brain, without making them feel like there's something wrong with them for not being able to provide emotional intimacy or affection? And so that to me is the absolute hardest part of relationship. How do you ask somebody to meet you in the middle when you don't wanna change somebody? But the inherent being in relationship with another person requires a give-and-take, it requires an evolution.

0:59:33.2 CZ: And so, how do you suss that out? And I think one thing that I have learned is that there's a difference between trying to change someone's inherent personality and trying to change the way that you communicate together, if that makes sense.

0:59:54.2 S1: Yeah.

0:59:55.7 CZ: So taking the emphasis off of the person or what they're lacking, or you're just not emotional, and placing the emphasis more on, "Let's talk about the thing between us. Let's talk about what is happening in the space between you and me, not you, not me, but what is happening in the space between you and me. And in the space between you and me, I'm not getting the signals... I know that you love me... It's like the whole goes back to the love language thing. I understand that you love me, but I'm not getting that message. And so can we talk about that?" And I think if we can just do that, I think sometimes that's enough to diffuse the defensiveness that happens in relationships where you're like... All your shit gets triggered where you're like, "Well, I'm not enough, and I'm not this, blah, blah, blah."

1:00:43.1 CZ: So that's one thing I have learned is if we can shift the conversation away from you to this thing between us, and maybe it's the communication, maybe it's the behaviors, maybe it's the delineation of roles and responsibilities, all of those things are like, to me, in the area between us and not necessarily in the person.

1:01:00.9 S1: Yeah. I don't remember where I first heard this, I wish I did, because massive shoutout to this person, but the idea that as much as possible, and this is true in all kinds of relationships, but as much as possible, if you can make it, you and the other person versus the issue as opposed to you versus the other person, that there's a subtle change there that can really shift how the conversation goes.

1:01:25.7 CZ: Yeah, I love that advice, and I think that's absolutely true. Just that team mentality instead of the, we're in a boxing ring together, it's like, "No, we are on a team and family double dare," I don't know why that just came to mind, but we're playing together as opposed to against each other.

1:01:43.5 S1: Can you give me an example of ways that you have changed for each other? And I put the "for each other" in big air quotes, 'cause I think you know what I mean, like the meeting in the middle, like what's a need of yours that he has consciously changed or altered behavior to meet

and then vice-versa?

1:02:01.1 CZ: That's such a great question. Well, I think a big one for me on my end has been the need for physical affection. So I would definitely say that I am someone who... One of my love languages is physical touch. However, without getting too far into stuff that is Jason's stuff to share and not mine to share, physical touch makes him uncomfortable for a whole host of reasons that are very understandable, and it wasn't until... So early on in our relationship, I just thought, "Oh well, he just doesn't wanna hold my hand, he doesn't like to be... Have PDA or whatever."

1:02:46.0 CZ: And that actually bothered me, but it wasn't until we opened up the conversation and I understood why and where that comes from that I then realized, "Oh, I actually wanna be a safe place for my partner. I don't wanna force him into displays of affection or moments of affection that I know are only gonna make him uncomfortable. I actually wanna be the opposite. I wanna be a place where he can... Where he feels like he could be totally himself and doesn't have to put on this show." And so over the years, I have asked myself, "What are some of my... What are the ways that I can have my emotional needs met that are not in that category?" And I have shifted over time. And it's still one of those things that I'm very aware of because we are not a very touchy-feely couple, but it's like I have this deep knowing of why that is. And I see the beauty in me changing the way that I receive love in order to create a safe place for my partner.

1:03:50.0 S1: But yeah, thank you for sharing that. That's such a good example.

1:03:52.7 CZ: Yeah. And then on his part, I mean definitely just being able to talk about feelings is huge. And I will share that early on in our relationship, kinda going back to this bigger question. Probably two or three months into our relationship, this is probably about the time that the whole like, "Are you the one?" Conversation was fucking with my brain because I'm realizing I'm not getting this emotional side that I really need in a relationship, I'm wondering... We've talked about it many times, we've sort of hit the stalemate a couple of times, and I'm starting to wonder, I don't wanna be that person in the relationship who's just nagging all the time and trying to get the other person to change. So I sort of have this realization that even though we have this unbelievable X-factor thing, just magnetism between us, and even though I've left this other relationship to pursue this. I come to this conclusion that I don't wanna spend my entire life begging someone to behave in a way that goes against who they are. That to me is not a foundation of a good relationship. So I break up with him [laughter] three months into our...

1:05:01.9 S1: With Jason.

1:05:02.9 CZ: With Jason. I break up with him. I have this conversation with him, I tell him, "I don't want you to have to change for me. I just think I have these needs, and I've really thought about it, and I think it's just our relationship is not going to meet those needs, and it's nothing to do with you. It's just that I don't know where to go from here, kind of thing." And that was a really big decision. And about two days go by, and Jason calls me and he's like... And this is very out of character for especially who he was at that time. He's like, "I haven't eaten for two days, I haven't been able to sleep." He's like, "I've really thought about this a really long time, and I've decided that

I know that you don't want to change me, but I want to change for you. I want to change for our relationship. This is something that I know about myself, that I wanna get better at. And so if you could just be patient with me, I think this is a change that I can make."

1:06:01.6 CZ: And I think it was such a crucial thing that had to happen in our relationship because, first of all, again, I don't believe in manipulating or doing tests like that, but inadvertently, it demonstrated to me a willingness on his part to evolve. It demonstrated a humility and a humbleness and a self-awareness that I honestly didn't know was there until that moment. And over the course of 11 years, he has continued to come to conversations with that level of like, "This is so deeply uncomfortable for me and is not in my nature, but I'm here to have these conversations with you because I care that much about you and I care about our relationship," and that just spoke such volumes to me. So that is an area that he's been willing to evolve for the relationship without feeling like I'm making him into a different person.

1:06:53.4 S1: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Oh, so good. There's so much good stuff in here.

1:06:56.8 CZ: And he's gotten so much better at it, I feel so proud of him. [laughter]

1:07:00.3 S1: Oh my god, gold stars for Jason.

1:07:01.7 CZ: Yeah.

1:07:04.9 S1: I don't know if this is gonna resonate with you, so feel free to reject this if I'm projecting onto you, but a way in which that I have a sense that you and I are similar, I guess, so I will talk about my experience, and then ask you what your perspective is, because I have a feeling that we're similar. Something that I have struggled with is feeling like the needier a person in a partnership, I'm... Especially in terms of physical situational needs, that it's like...

1:07:35.8 CZ: Yes.

1:07:36.0 S1: [1:07:36.0] is a much better sleeper than me. I need it to be this... It needs to be dark, this needs to happen, I don't want there to be music on during the day. I just have so many... I'm much more of a delicate flower, I feel like, than he is, whether that's in regard to my anxiety or just my preferences or whatever, and I tend to experience, I would say, I don't know, a wider range... Not a wider range for emotions. I don't even really know what that means. But I just feel like I'm the needier person, and sometimes I can carry a lot of guilt about that because just because my needs might be more acute or extreme than his doesn't mean that he doesn't have preferences, and I feel like sometimes my needs eclipse his. And I don't know, my sense is that that is also true in your relationship, and if so, help. [laughter]

1:08:27.7 CZ: 100% yes, spot-on. And yeah, this is something I really struggle with personally, because I'm a highly sensitive person, I'm also someone who struggles with anxiety, and these... A delicate flower, if you will. These needs that I have, they have very real consequences in the way that I'm able to show up and be fully resource as a person who can just even give to our

relationship. However, that puts this responsibility on him sometimes to, yeah, minimize his own needs, or... I mean, granted, I check in with him often and he sometimes has trouble diagnosing his own needs, which really is lucky for me [chuckle] because it's not like he's suppressing them, he's just not having them. Which I tell him all the time, is I'm like, "I think that's probably something to explore in therapy one day with yourself." But I will say a couple of things that have helped me.

1:09:26.6 CZ: Number one with the guilt, I have learned the hard way over many years that dampening or suppressing or minimizing my needs that I do have does not make them go away, it makes the consequences much worse. And actually, Jason has then been the unfortunate bearer of those consequences as well, see 2019 me going through a full-on anxiety crisis, not being able to work for six months. Like really having to rebuild my mental health from the ground up. So we both have now experienced the deep consequences of me not checking in with my needs and saying, "I'm reaching my point here, my breaking point here." So having sort of a low point to point to to say like, it is a good thing that I'm voicing these things helps me minimize the guilt because I'm going, Well, I'm actually... By saying this out loud, I actually am participating in a positive way in our relationship because I'm protecting the team, if that makes sense.

1:10:26.0 S1: Mm-hmm.

1:10:28.8 CZ: And another mental shift that I had to make too, was that when I as the sensitive person, as the delicate flower who does need a lot of... A lot of the household duties can sometimes fall by the wayside. Jason picks up a lot of slack just in the household department. He cooks a lot of the meals. He runs the household. Like I said, he keeps trains moving on time, all of that stuff. He's very much like the caretaker in our relationship, and that can get exhausting, I know, and that can start to weigh on me to feel like, "Oh, he's just taking care of me." However... And I can start to feel like, "Oh, well, what am I contributing really?" There's all this very visible stuff that he's contributing to our household and relationship, and it can start to feel unbalanced on the surface. But something that I've worked through in therapy and that I've worked through within myself is to see the value in emotional labor, to see the value in emotional capital, the thing that I...

1:11:34.1 CZ: The invisible work that gets brought to our relationship is the glue that I bring for all of these years of having these conversations, of checking in, of going to therapy, of all of that stuff. And so I have to learn to see the value in that, even though the price I pay for that sometimes is needing to recharge my batteries and needing more physical environmental help and support. But I think the first step to minimizing the guilt is seeing that stuff is valuable, the same way that taking out the trash is valuable.

1:12:08.0 S1: Yeah, that's such a good point, thank you. Yes, I knew you have good perspective. [laughter] So in addition to being your husband, Jason is your business partner, which I think is very interesting. I have many questions about this. I don't know that we will even get to the ball. But the first question... I think about this a lot when I'm listening to the podcast that the two of you have together, that for better or worse, you have somewhat of a public marriage and your marriage is part of your brand. It feels icky to me to say that [chuckle] because...

1:12:37.7 CZ: Yeah.

1:12:38.8 S1: Like, bleh. But it's true. And...

1:12:43.8 CZ: It's true, totally true.

1:12:44.8 S1: I'm curious what that feels like that that's true.

1:12:51.4 CZ: That's a really great question. I know I've said that a lot of times, but you're very good at this. [laughter]

1:12:58.5 S1: Thanks, friend.

1:13:00.7 CZ: You just ask really good questions. I've never... Is it weird to say I've never really thought about it? And I'll tell you why. Because I think one crucial bit is before we decided to combine businesses together... Okay, so we've worked together in some capacity since 2012, but that was when Jason had this business called I Wear Your Shirt. It was basically an influencer business before that was even a word. And so he would wear companies' logos on his t-shirt and he would make online content each day of the year and put it online. And so in 2012, I quit my advertising job to go work for his company, mainly because I was jealous that I had to get up and go commute an hour to go work at an office, and he got to make videos where he dressed up like a lion and post it on YouTube every day. And I was like, "Can I do that?" [chuckle] And so I convinced him to hire me so I could run some of the operations. And so we've worked together in some capacity since 2012. But in 2014, that business became clear that it was just not financially sustainable, and he was really burnt out on doing it, and so I had this choice of, "Do I go back to some type of corporate job, or do I try to take what I've learned the past two years of working pretty much for myself and do it on my own?" And so from 2014 until we combined businesses in 2018, I had my own thing.

1:14:23.2 CZ: So this is where I've really cultivated... Where I started out as a designer, then I really moved into becoming a visual artist and a writer. And so I created my own brand called Made Vibrant over the course of those four years, and I think that was so crucial because now that we... Our main business... Actually, we have two businesses, but our main business is called Wandering Aimfully, it's a coaching program for intentional online business owners, and we run that together. We decided to basically turn my Made Vibrant brand and his personal brand into one, into Wandering Aimfully in 2018. But now that we've done that, and now that you say that our marriage is a very key part of that business, I don't have this fear around that because I could always do my own thing. Even... And we've said this from the beginning, 'cause it took a lot of convincing for me to kind of roll Made Vibrant into Wandering Aimfully, and he said, "It is always gonna be on the table that we can stop this and we can go back to doing our own thing. That is always on the table." And so because that option has always existed, I don't have this fear around, "Oh, it all relies on that," or "What happens if our marriage is rocky or whatever?" And I think that just comes from also living...

1:15:39.0 CZ: I hate this buzzword because of what it's become, but I do tend to live my life online pretty authentically. And if it fell apart, I would tell people it fell apart, and I just don't have a lot of fear around that.

1:15:51.4 S1: Yeah, no, that's relatable to me too. Do you guys have... Maybe checklist is too clinical, but a checklist of things that you're like, "We're not gonna talk about this stuff publicly." What do boundaries look like around sharing when it comes to work stuff, versus marriage?

1:16:11.3 CZ: I think in general it's not topics that are off limits, but it's very much I like to share from a place... I don't like to share from a place when it's super raw, I think that's just a way to protect my own processing, and not get too many inputs when I'm really in the thick of something. Oh, I know, actually, a great example that comes to mind, is family stuff. So where other people are involved, we've gone through quite a bit of tumultuous things with family. Our families of origin, I'll say, 'cause we're a family, but also the families that we come from, this year. And I've wanted to share about that, because inside of our coaching program we're very, very, very transparent.

1:16:53.3 CZ: That's why I'm struggling to find things that are off-limits, because we share with them in real time. Because I think that's part of the value of being in that community, is people who are not trying to pretend like they have it all together, but showing you we deal with hard life stuff and trying to run a business at the same time. But I had to have a conversation with Jason about, I don't feel comfortable fully divulging this scenario and situation to our members because other people are involved. And so we still shared with them in vague terms, because I think everyone can relate to what happens when you realize that certain members of your family are actually creating harm for you in your life. And it's very painful to go through a transition of trying to change your relationship to that. And so I wanted to share that aspect of it without sharing details. So that's something that we stick pretty close to the vest, but everything else, we're definitely an open book I would say.

1:17:50.2 S1: Yeah, yeah, I'm pretty much the same way. How on a more day-to-day basis, do you not let work or work conversations seep into every single part of the day together?

1:18:02.3 CZ: It's always been this way. Work is always going to seep into every part of our day, because we love it, truly. So I think there was a time where we sort of felt guilty about that, because there was a lot of this stuff about separating work and life. And we very much subscribe more to this philosophy of work-life blend, like it just is always gonna blur the lines for us. And that's not a bad thing when you enjoy your work. But I will say that the more that we get clear about the amount of hours that we're willing to work on the business, the more we have a little bit of a clearer delineation, so we try to wrap up work around... Really when it gets dark is when we just kind of try to shut down. So depending on the time of year is when that happens. And this time of year it's like, "And 4:00 PM, I'm done." But after that, conversation does tend to steer pretty clear of work stuff, and a little bit more about, "Hey, I stumbled across this today," or we'll watch a movie and have a conversation about that. But we're just chatting about... If we're being honest, we're chatting about work all the time, and it's because we love it.

1:19:14.1 S1: And I sort of assumed that that was the case, and I'm very similar to that, But I don't know, I've been thinking a lot lately about the fact just because I love my work, which I do, and the blessing of having made this weird job for myself where pretty much all or a lot of my interests and curiosities can get rolled under this umbrella. I also think that there's a downside there, that there's a tendency to try to roll too many things under the umbrella. And I don't know, just because I love something doesn't mean that I don't need breaks from it, or that I don't benefit from taking breaks from it. And I have found that when I have made it a, "You know, I'm really not gonna talk about work today," or just having some of those harder boundaries around it, which have been very, very difficult for me to implement for a lot of the reasons that you mentioned, that it's been really beneficial. And I imagine... And again, I'm projecting, I imagine that that would be a big struggle if my partner was also my business partner.

1:20:13.3 CZ: Oh yeah, I will say there are definitely times where that hard boundary is set. And it's just about vocalizing it. It's just about saying... For example, literally after our conversation, I think I told you before we started recording, I'm on a day and a half full blackout, like a full... No work, I do not want any responsibilities. I do not want any pressure put on me. And that's just, again, going back to those needs. I know that I need a hard reset, and all it takes is truly about a day and a half for me. But it's just, I need that full sinking into no responsibility. So Jason will know, don't bring stuff to me about that, and I'm just very clear about communicating that to me, and same with him, he really... Not to be a total cliché, but he really likes... His one time is Sundays, watching football, that's where he shuts off, and so it's sort of like, don't bring to me things about Monday, don't bring to me... A lot of times if I'm writing, for example, the newsletter that goes out the following Monday, I try to get that to him by Friday so that he's not trying to format it on Sunday to go...

1:21:21.7 CZ: Because he's the one that does that, because I know that that football time is kind of sacred to him and shutting his brain off, so I'm glad you mentioned that aside 'cause I was thinking of it more on a day-to-day basis, but we definitely have, on a more week-to-week basis. We have those times where we're like, "Nope, this is sacred for me, or I need this," so this is what I need.

1:21:43.2 S1: The benefit that I have found from an actual full break, when you said it takes you about a day or a day and a half, actual rest for a day and a half is so much more nourishing for me than partial or fake rest for two weeks, and that has really helped me...

1:22:01.9 CZ: A hundred percent.

1:22:02.6 S1: This has nothing to do with marriage or relationships, but work stuff, it has really helped me to have some more of those boundaries, even if it would be fun to keep working or I've had a lot of success taking full black out periods from Instagram, for example, where it's just like, I feel like I need to delete this for a couple weeks, and I have tried in the past where it's like, well, I say I'm not really gonna post, but I'm still checking in or it's not on my phone, but I'm still looking on the browser and as opposed to I am logged out of everything, I'm not even gonna peek, I'm not even gonna look. If I need some information off Instagram, I'm gonna ask Jen to get it for me, that's so much more nourishing, taking actual breaks. So yeah, very much plus one to that.

1:22:40.5 CZ: Yeah, it's like the difference between minimizing a program on your computer versus quitting the app. You know what I mean? It's like, I don't need it minimized, I don't need it running in the background, I need it full on, Command+Q, it is... There is no dot on my doc, I use a Mac, it is done, and it really is a difference in mindset. And it's just about communicating to your partner, to bring it back to the relationship aspect, "Are we in a minimized place or are we in a full quit the app place? And what's the difference between those?"

1:23:13.9 S1: Totally. So last thing about this, any pieces of advice for anyone who's thinking about going into business in any capacity with their partner or anything that you wish you would have known at the beginning?

1:23:26.6 CZ: I think the two pieces of advice. Number one is always gonna be over-communicate, that's... You've probably notice this is a theme. Granted, I'm a communicator by nature, so that's the way that I come at everything, but especially when it comes to business, we check in often, we check in pretty much daily. What is the other person working on? Not in a micro-managing capacity, but very much in a making sure that you know how the other person is spending their time so that you know that they are equally committed to this, so what can happen sometimes is if we go like a week without checking in, I have no idea what he's... I'm like, "What have you been doing even?" Because you're so focused on what you're doing and what you're working on, that it can be very easy to overlook what the other person has been spending their hard hours on, so it's just always being really clear about, "Oh, wow."

1:24:20.5 CZ: So you can support them, you can appreciate their hard work, I think a lot in relationships is just about appreciation, like, "Thank you for working really hard on that." So the daily check-ins are key and just communicating a lot, and I think also about having conversations early on about where each of you thinks your strengths lie, and being really clear in celebrating the other person for the strengths that they bring, and being really honest and humble about your own weak spots, that's just good advice for working within a team completely. But I think especially with your partner, weaknesses can sometimes be triggers, strengths can sometimes be an ego thing, so just tiptoe... Not tiptoeing, but being delicate with those conversations and being honest in those conversations can save a lot of heartache down the road.

1:25:11.8 S1: Great advice, I appreciate that. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you really wanted to mention or dig into, or ask or share, anything?

1:25:23.7 CZ: I don't think so. I just think relationships are really fascinating, and I think it all comes down to just honoring the unique relationship that you have and honoring the unique person that you are, and really trying as much as possible to separate the noise of what you think a relationship should be, from the signal of what you desire. What you want out of your life, what you want out of your partnerships, and recognizing that the possibilities for that are truly endless. If you have the creativity and the self-awareness to truly build it in your own way from the ground up, I think that is what leads to a positive and happy relationship because it's built on what you really want and not what you think you should want.

1:26:09.2 S1: Yeah, sometimes I have to remind myself that all of this is made up, we're just making all of this up, and it's like if you want your relationship to look like this, okay, great, if you want it to look like this, okay, great. And that I don't know, we think there's all these rules to follow and there really are not.

1:26:23.9 CZ: There are not, that's why it's so funny, when I think back of the whole marriage thing, I'm like, "Well, we could... If I really wanted to use the word husband and wife, did I really need to stand on a cliff and sign a piece of paper? I did not." [laughter]

1:26:35.4 S1: I know. I remember this came up with another guest in this podcast series about, well, if you wanna wear rings, even if you're not married, as an outward symbol, you can. And I was like, "What? What do you mean?"

1:26:46.9 CZ: Oh hell yeah!

1:26:48.3 S1: It's just so funny that even... I consider myself someone who, when you... The spectrum you described where Jason's like question everything, rebel against everything, I don't know that I'm to that extreme. But I'm definitely closer to that end of the spectrum, and yet there's still these things that I get caught on where I'm like, "What do you mean that you could wear rings even if you weren't married?" It's just so funny.

1:27:05.8 CZ: The ring police will get us. It's like, "What?"

1:27:09.1 S1: They definitely will. Oh my God. Well, I think that's a really good place to start to wrap up. I was gonna ask you if you could leave people with an affirmation of sorts based on the conversation, what that would be like, a wish for everyone listening. But I feel like what you just said was exactly that.

1:27:23.3 CZ: Yeah, with probably too many words, but yeah, you could pluck out whatever words from that is more succinct and that is what I wish for you.

1:27:30.7 S1: Yes, yes. What is the best place for people to find you and come say hi online? Do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks? Are you open to people saying hi? What's the best way?

1:27:41.4 CZ: We're definitely taking a step back from social media, however, your best chance of saying hi is definitely my personal Instagram, which is @CKelso, and so you can find me there and I'm hoping to post art in the new year more there, but we will see if that happens. We'll leave it open-ended there, and then if you are interested in more of what Jason and I do together, you can go over to @wanderingaimfully on Instagram or wanderingaimfully.com. And like I said, we're taking a bit of an Instagram break, but you can check out our old stuff. It's good too.

1:28:16.7 S1: Awesome, I will put links to all of that in the show notes. Could not more sincerely

and more highly recommend you and Jason's podcast. I love it very much. Thank you so much.

1:28:25.8 CZ: Thank you so much! This was so lovely. I could have chatted with you for another hour, obviously, but we'll keep it to this.

1:28:31.5 S1: Yes.

[music]

1:28:41.0 S1: Thanks so much for listening to this very first season of the Pop-Up Pod. All of the intimate and honest conversations you'll hear on this show are 100% listener-funded, paid for by my sliding scale Patreon community. That means no ads and no sponsors, just a couple hundred people coming together to ensure that everyone involved in making this podcast gets paid. That includes me as the host and creator, my sound engineer and musician, Adam Day, as well as every single one of our guests. The Patreon community also funds the creation of a full transcript for each episode, which you can find in the show notes to help make these conversations more accessible for all. Those are our production ethics here at the Pop-Up Pod, and if that aligns with your own values, I would love to invite you to come check out our community at patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. It's a fun, easy and welcoming space. You also get access to lots of bonuses. And remember, it's run on a sliding scale, so you can pay whatever amount makes most sense for you each month, depending on your circumstances. That's patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. And hopefully, I'll see you there.

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