

Stu: Yeah, I think everybody wants to be fluent. But it's the journey to get there that's a little more complicated.

Masha: I think so. Yes. So welcome, everybody. Happy New Year. Happy New Year Stu!

Stu: Happy New Year!

Masha: Thank you!

Stu: I see you got your Christmas tree back there.

Masha: I do. I do. I have this Christmas tree. I worked really hard. I did a lot of research looking for it this year. New York was really crazy with the prices. Christmas trees were **running for** like \$250 for something like this.

- **To run for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ = to cost**

Stu: What? How tall is it?

Masha: This one well, I didn't spend \$250. This one is like a little bit over seven feet.

Stu: Oh OK, it's kind of a big one. I got..mine's... like maybe five feet.

Masha: Okay. How much did you pay?

Stu: I think we paid \$100.

Masha: \$100? Yeah. Like the people in front of our houses in front of our house. They were like **Scrooges**. You know, they were trying to charge 250 to 275. And so I did all this research. Whole Foods was selling it for like 70 bucks. But they sold out. Yeah, right. But then I found this one place near our house, a hardware store. And they had this thing where it was like anything about seven feet was \$100.

- **Scrooge**: a selfish unfriendly person

Stu: That's pretty good.

Masha. Yeah that's reasonable. So, Kaya, my daughter, chose the biggest one possible because our limit was unlimited.

Stu: Because of course **the bigger, the better**

- **The bigger, the better**: if something is big, it is better

Masha: of course you gotta you gotta maximize. When we were walking home, pushing it in the cart everyone was like "Nice tree!", "Good job!"

Stu: I always just go outside on the street because it's literally across the street from my apartment. And we can just carry it back. And so I feel if I'm paying too much for the convenience is worth the price.

Masha: That's true. This year, I just couldn't do it.

Stu: Yeah, I also see you got an interesting sweatshirt.

Masha: I do. I do. Ok let me see if I can....It says New York or Nowhere.

Stu: Ah, All right.

Masha: So I've been feeling like there are a lot of people that are still saying like New York is done and I'm so tired of New York. I was listening to this podcast yesterday and this girl was like I'm so done with New York like I'm so tired of it I'm moving to LA and I immediately turned off the podcast. Ok, I'm done.

Stu: Oh, yeah, no I have no time for that. I mean, it's not only you know, living here, but also my wife is from Northern California. And they have no time for SoCal.

- **Socal:** Southern California

Masha: Oh ok!

Stu: So anytime I hear L.A> I'm just like.... nah

Masha: I'm done with that. So

Stu: It's just jealousy.

Masha: I think so too. New York is just,... but also it's like we were just getting over the pandemic, give us a little time to like breathe and get back to normal.

Stu: Right. I do feel that this New Year felt a lot like before the pandemic you know, cause we had the ....I don't go to Time Square, but like the first new year, it was limited only to the health care people I think.

Masha: Yes.

Stu: And then the second one, it was like lower capacity because of Omicron. And then this year, there were so many people in town for New Year.

Masha: totally normal. There's tourists everywhere and like I was walking in Soho and I was thinking, "God I hate all these people", but then I was like, but I'm also like, grateful that we're kind of back.

Stu: Oh absolutely it's the same. Yeah, like I thought about that. Back I guess it was summer of 2020 I was going around Central Park. And there was just hardly anybody there. I was like It's summer. There's nobody in Central Park.

Masha: It was **creepy**. It was creepy right?

- **Creepy:** Strange

Stu: Well it was also kind of nice and you don't have the crowds.

Right. We've also got the same thing you know, I got off the subway last week and I was like, Oh my God, there's so many people here and you know, there's a certain way that you should walk around Midtown. And so it was frustrating but then the same I was like, oh, you know, actually it is good for the city. And, of course I want people to come and join and see all the great stuff here.

Masha: Yes, yeah. So it's like this kind of conflicted feeling of like it's kind of nice having these like streets to yourself, you know?

Stu: Yeah, it was. Definitely. Early on, it was really creepy. I remember I did a bike ride around the city, I think in May. And it was shocking to see Times Square with nobody. Like there were a couple of construction workers. There were some, kind of crazy, like religious people who camped out there for a while. And then like I rode over the Brooklyn Bridge. Normally you can't even ride there because there's so many people. And so it was very strange to see that and so I do, I do feel kind of relieved. That it's getting back to normal.

Masha: Yes, you're right, there is a way to like walk in New York. You shouldn't take up the whole street. You should kind of like....

- **Take up the whole .....**: use the whole...

Stu: And you don't stop

Masha: No and if you stop you like go to the side.

Stu: Right. Exactly.

Masha: We have rules here.

Stu: Exactly. I'm a fast walker also. And so I feel after coming here I found, you know, **I found my people** for walking. No nonsense. And so it's to say that I also noticed too, you can always tell when someone's from out of town because they don't stand in the street when they're waiting to cross. They stand on the sidewalk and they're watching the signal. They're not watching the traffic for their opportunity to **jaywalk**.

- **To find one's people:** to find people who are similar to you.
- **Jaywalk:** to cross the street without looking at the cars or signals.

Masha: Oh yes, that's true. That's true, because in New York, you don't follow... I mean, again, we have rules but we don't have rules right.

Stu: Well the rule ...

Masha: You're not supposed to wait. Keep going.

Stu: Yeah right nobody has time for that.

Masha: And you check which way can I go this way? Go this way.

Stu: Exactly, you look for the traffic and then there's a gap and you go the light is kind of irrelevant.

Masha: Yes. It's just a **formality**.

So it's the New Year. What's going on with your resolutions? The big question.

- **Formality:** Something that is there or something that we have to do because we have done it for a long time

Stu: Yeah, of course. Like always, I have so many resolutions when I want to do everything. And so usually though, most of my resolutions are usually not cycling. And so this year, I'm going to try to get 5000 miles this year.

Masha: That sounds like a large number.

Stu: It's a lot and you definitely I'm already a little behind because you know the weather and everything but it is. 5000 is about a little less than 100 a week.

Masha: Ok.

Stu: And so I tried to break it down into smaller pieces. But then of course, you know, you can't average 100 a week every week of the year. So it ends up being there's a lot more in the summer, but then in the kind of shoulder seasons. You got to still keep doing something to make it more manageable.

Masha: Well, I'm always impressed that you always set these goals and you reach pretty close or you do reach them or you reach ....

Stu: Sometimes. It depends. I mean you each year is a bit different. But yeah, last year I definitely did it with a couple of days to spare. And then or just two years ago rather last year I didn't quite make it. I got I had an injury and then also with other stuff going on, I just got too busy. But yeah, it's something I think you have to really try to work at it consistently. And the more you put something off the worst it's going to be the less likely it is you're going to do it.

Masha: Well like 5000 is a pretty large number. So how do you motivate yourself? How do you like plan that? How do you not get overwhelmed?

Stu: Breaking it down. Also part of it is something I enjoy. A lot of it is I'd have to motivate myself when the weather's bad. Also, I have an indoor bike that I can use. If it's really bad, you know if it's icy, it's too dangerous to be out. And so, so I have kind of ways to get around that and then yes, also being flexible, I think because like it'd be nice in a perfect world I'd wake up early and do it. But I don't want to wake up early. So sometimes it has to be late at night.

Masha: So how.. do you reward yourself like when you've reached like, let's say you have like markers where you reward yourself that okay, I can keep doing it.

Stu: I actually don't do that. Actually it's a good idea. I mean, I do feel you know when I have an app called Strava for it and then I'm able to set a weekly goal and then it shows me when I reach my weekly goal. And so that's kind of a marker, you know, that I'm on track.

Masha: Okay, yeah. I really respect that because I always kind of every year I have these resolutions and I kind of I'm going to do this every day or I'm going I make these large resolutions and then I feel like January I'm like so consistent. I run a marathon and then you know, something obviously happens and then I kind of finish midway and I'm like alright, I'll, I'll do the next resolution next year. So I'll just wait the whole year to make another resolution. So I feel like I always **bite off more than I can chew**, which is good expression, you know, but

- **bite off more than I can chew:** take on more responsibilities than I can handle

Stu: Sure. I think a lot of people I mean, it's kind of similar. Another way I think about it. It's actually good to be ambitious with the goals because even if you don't actually reach it, you still are going to push yourself to go farther than you would have otherwise.

Masha: Yeah, so I've been reading a lot about resolutions and I was listening to, actually, a podcast last week and this guy was talking about just taking small goals like setting. He was talking about this one guy who wanted to go to the gym every day and so he went for five minutes. He would go to the gym, take him I don't know how long go into the gym, spend five minutes there and leave and at least kind of creating that habit. And just kind of creating, setting these small goals so that you can check that off and like make another goal so that you're always kind of you're never finished right cause....

Stu: Of course, yeah. I think it's a great idea. I think it's one that a lot of things. You know when you think about your ultimate goal is something that's far away. It's so big that you can't really wrap your head around it. But then you start to break it down into kind of smaller goals that, you know, it's more manageable, you know. It's like take a one bite at a time

Masha: Yes, instead of eating the whole pizza or meal. And so I was thinking about how it kind of relates to learning English, right? So like our company name is Be Fluent, which sets up a really, really large goal,

Stu: Yeah, it's a lifetime of work.

Masha: Yes, and a lot of people you know, it's like when you when we meet them the first time or ask them what they want to do or like I want to be fluent. I want to speak English fluently. Great, but like, So recently I've been asking like, but like, about what, right? Like, what's the topic you want to talk about? Or what's something small you can do? Because I think a lot of times people will say like, I want to be fluent and then they'll study for three months, six months, even a year, even two years and they'll be like, Man, I'm not improving. I want to give up or I don't want to do it. But it's like the goal is a lifetime goal, you know, so what can you do now, you know?

Stu: Sure. I think about it with languages I think about tasks, because when we learn a language, ultimately we're going to be fluent in some situation, you know. It's kind of like what is the function or the outcome that you want, you know, like, I want to be able to order at Starbucks. Or, you know, I want to introduce myself at a party. And that's something that you can really focus in on and you can build up to be able to do that. And then you know, ultimately after you do that for a while your fluency will increase.

Masha: Yes. Yeah, and I was even thinking like, I want to cook more right and that even is so big. Like what do you want to cook? I want to make more salads. Okay, so then from that I can be like, alright, if I want to make more salads, then I need to like research the different leaves and different words for that. So...

Stu: How to make it you know how to add variety so that you don't **get sick of it**? Yes, exactly.

- **Get sick of something:** get tired of doing something

Masha: I'm still thinking about my I'm not stressing that much about my New Year's goal. But I'd like to I was thinking about I want to walk. I've been reading a lot about how walking is so important, just like every day a little bit. So at first I was like, Can I walk every day but then it was like alright, I want to walk three times a week. So that if I do four I'll feel like proud of myself that I achieved a little more than I wanted to do.

Stu: It also seems three days a week seems very reasonable. Every day, things happen that you can't control.

Masha: Right you get sick or you get busy. Or the weather gets worse, you know?

Stu: Oh, yeah, I mean, it's definitely coming. That's one of the reasons it's nice to have an indoor bike. You know, it's not so bad right now, but in January things begin **to take a turn**.

- **Take a turn:** get worse

Masha: You think so? Today is like summer weather, **t-shirt weather**.

- **t-shirt weather:** warm weather

Stu: They have the heat on in my building. And I have the window open now because it's so hot.

Masha: So what advice would you give someone who's like, "Alright, I want to study English this year. I want to improve my English somehow."

Stu: I think it's think about the situation and what you want to do with it. And so, the goal maybe is not to learn English is to use English for some purpose. And so that totally depends on what they want to do. And so, I think also, I'd say follow your interest. So you know, if you want to cook, try to find a group of people who cook and who are using English and then you learn English to join the club, and have fun, and you will learn and you will make friends. And so I think that that's an important thing that you have to match what you really want. And so similar, like if you think about some of the proficiency exams like TOEFL or IELTS, you know those are fine. But do you really need that? If you're going to study in the university then you need to study that but if you don't, then it's not really going to be something that you can use. And then I think if you're not interested, you're not going to keep doing it.

Masha: Oh, yes, totally **soul-crushing** and studying for the TOEFL when you don't need it is, you're not going to use. "Okay, speak in 20 seconds!" "Answer my question!"

- **Soul-crushing:** something that is not enjoyable at all

Stu: I think if you enjoy something, you're going to be more consistent and you're gonna keep doing it. And it shouldn't be work.

Masha: Yeah, yeah. And it's and you know, like, I had a student and I asked her something, and she didn't understand what I said. And then after later she did and she was really upset and I thought about myself learning languages and how much like when I learned language, I like to just like get into it. I like to just take a class. I enjoy not understanding anything. That's something that for me is a fun feeling. For some people, they really don't like it. They want to understand everything.

But so like, I remember when I was in Japan, and I was taking a tennis class, a weekly tennis class, nobody spoke English. I spoke basically zero Japanese, I was like, Hi. And we were playing a doubles game. And the teacher yelled at me he was like, "my", "my", and I was like, oh my god, he spoke English to me and he said, "My" Okay, he's gonna take it. I was like, okay, he's speaking English. To me. He's trying to communicate. And then the ball came to me, and I couldn't hit it. And I was just like, "Whoa, what just happened?" He spoke English to me and I couldn't express the situation. I couldn't ask. I went home, looked at my dictionary and was like, Oh, my means like, go forward. And I thought, Oh, okay. Even though that situation is kind of embarrassing. Everybody was looking at me, the teacher was obviously so upset. I thought, okay, so that situation I learned and then I learned all the words that have to do with like, go forward, go back. So that the next time I would be ready, so I think also a lot of people will go to a coffee shop or do something and someone doesn't understand you. And especially in New York, where everyone's like "What? What?" but you know, not to give up you know, and just like "Alright, well, what could I have done better?" or like, use that as a good experience, you know,

and make that “Okay, my next goal will be to be able to take a tennis lesson and understand what they're saying.”

Stu: Sure, yeah. It's a really good point that a part of learning is making mistakes, you know, and I, I remember when I went to China, I didn't, I spoke with three words of Chinese, maybe. And I started taking lessons and I made so many mistakes. And I said something really embarrassing with the teacher and she laughed and laughed and laughed. But then she told all the other people I worked with because she taught them as well. So it was super embarrassing, but I survived. You know, I didn't die and I learned and I would never make the same mistake again. And so it is tough. You know, it is tough to make mistakes and have these situations. But then it's how we learn that you know, we found something that was a weakness or a gap in our knowledge and you can focus in on that and then you will do better the next time.

Masha: Yeah, yeah, kind of using each situation is almost like a way to set a goal. Right. Like I was in that meeting. I couldn't introduce myself. Okay, great. So now you know what you need to do.

Stu: Exactly. Yeah. So it's kind of **a cliché**, but it is an opportunity to be able to find out what you need.

- **A cliché:** something that everyone says

Stu: But yeah, I think that it's, it's important to, to have that kind of awareness to you know, that you know, when something goes wrong, kind of analyze it, think about okay, like, what is it? What can I do to make it better than the next time? I think also, for learning a language I think about like vocabulary is really important. Because like you were saying that it's like there are these situations that there's a group of words that you're probably going to need. When I was in China I did that at the market. That was kind of my first step was being able to get food. So I would look up a bunch of words that I would need at the market, like I need potatoes and whatever. And then I studied those, I'd go in and do it. And then after that, okay, like they didn't understand why I said this. I need to work on that one. And so it's just kind of having an awareness of what you're saying and what they're not understanding.

Masha: Yeah, and I like how you said like analysis and like analyzing that situation, which I think there's so much like fear that goes into learning. There's so much **vulnerability**, you're so like, you know, some people attend universities, that have jobs, they come here and it's like, you know, you can't really say anything. Right?

- **Vulnerability:** weakness/ feeling scared

Stu: Yeah! Like, it's like, you become, like, illiterate or you become like a baby and it's frustrating.

Masha: But I like how you said that you kind of go back and you analyze that and you kind of think because I think learning the language is a really... I don't know the word but it's like it's a process where you really have to get to know yourself.



Stu: Absolutely. Oh, yeah, I think I think you do that. it's one that we don't learn a second language the same way as we learn our first language. You know, it's something that you have to **be very deliberate about**. I also think, too, with a lot of the goals one of the things too is to be aware that learning a language takes a long time. And you can't compare yourself to other people, but you definitely can't compare yourself to a native speaker. Because, you know, we've been learning English our entire lives. You know, we had years of formal study and we had years of just experience. You know, you learn so fast when you're a child. And so as an adult, it's slower and it's a different process. And so I think people need to **be kind of patient with themselves**, not overly critical when you don't, everything doesn't go perfectly.

- **be very deliberate about:** focus and take time when you do something
- **be kind of patient with oneself:** be kind to yourself

Masha: Yeah. And as you were saying that I was thinking about how just also like, recognizing the good things that you do. Okay, I couldn't do this. I couldn't say this, but what did you do? Oh, I actually could you know, I could speak to someone I could say, so focusing on the things that you can do because again, **it's really a mindset**. And if you, with anything, probably biking, exercising, walking, if you start saying I can't, you won't.

- **it's really a mindset:** a way of thinking

I was talking to a student about that. He's like, "I just I can't express". I was like, well, then you won't, but you have to like be like I can and I want to I think it's **easier said than done**.

- **easier said than done:** it easy to say but difficult to do

Stu: Right? Yeah. It's hard. Learning a language is a difficult process. And I think I do think that **having a positive mindset** is good. And also having the mindset that you want to take a risk with something and you want to try to use something. And sometimes it's not successful, but maybe you nail it and it's perfect.

- **having a positive mindset:** positive way of thinking

Masha: Yeah. And if it's not, then you analyze it, like you said, go back and like "what did I do?" Well, hopefully that's helpful for anyone watching.

Stu: Absolutely. I really do love languages, even though it is always that kind of **love-hate relationship** with studying and I think that it's, it's also a way especially for people who live here. It's a great way to enjoy the city. I mean, there's a lot. There's a lot of great stuff in New York, but you probably need English for it. And so yeah, I think everybody should get out and use English to enjoy living in New York.

- **love-hate relationship:** something you hate and love at the same time

Masha: I think so too. And, and, you know, you don't if it's hard to make friends, you know, I was thinking like, go to the farmers market and chat with the farmers and ask a simple questions or

ask someone like, what time is it or how do I get to the subway so that there's like, every day you're communicating in some way, you know?

Masha: All right. Well, Happy New Year to everyone. We'll see you soon.

Stu: Bye!