

ALIA: Hey everyone and welcome to Season 2 of So Bob. We're so happy to be back and we're so happy you're back here with us. Now, if you remember, we had some pretty lofty goals for this season. I was left feeling super unsure about my experience with technology.

Season 1 had just wrung us dry and left us in a pretty bleak place.

Like "is-there-any-hope-or-is-technology-dooming-us-forever" level of bleak.

Understandably, when thinking about Season 2, I just wanted to find some reasonable hope. Just some pure joy in the world. Anything!

Bob heard my cry loud and clear, and introduced me to a really cool person named Gretchen Rubin. If you haven't heard of her, first of all what are you doing? Go look her up right now. She's kind of a big deal. She literally wrote a book called *The Happiness Project* and she hosts the podcast '*Happier*' *With Gretchen Rubin*. So I'd say she's the leading expert on happiness!

Our question today was a little more broad than usual which is--how does tech affect our happiness? Can it help us achieve it?

And the conversation we had with Gretchen went deeper than we ever imagined. And that's why today's episode is a little bit different. It's just Bob, me, and Gretchen in a room talking about happiness and tech and everything in between.

[AD BREAK]

BOB: First of all, could you introduce yourself?

GRETCHEN: Oh, uh, the short version or a longer version?

BOB: Yeah, the short version

GRETCHEN: Uh, I'm Gretchen Rubin. I'm a writer and podcaster about happiness, good habits and human nature. I have a podcast, *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*, and we often talk about the tendencies. So for people who want to hear more about the tendencies, that comes up a lot on the podcast. And then I have a, I wrote a book about the four tendencies because that's like, I, you know, it's kind of fun I have to say to be like, I invented this. So like I am the world's expert. I'm like, I'm writing a book and like no one can say me nay because I literally, um, am the one who created this. So that was fun. It was fun to write a book where I am the world's leading authority.

ALIA: Can you explain what The Happiness Project is...

GRETCHEN: Oh, okay,

ALIA: And like why you got into it?

GRETCHEN: So The Happiness Project is a book I wrote about 10 years ago. I just had my 10th anniversary edition come up, come out and it was a um, I got the idea for it cause I was on a crowded bus in the pouring rain and I thought, what do I want from life anyway? I want to be happy. And I thought, well I don't spend any time thinking about whether I'm happier, or if I could be happier. So I thought to myself I should have a happiness project. Those were the words that came into my mind, and I ran to the library the next day and got this giant stack of books and started researching like, what is happiness? Can you make yourself happier? What would you do if you can make yourself happier? Kind of what's the ancient philosophy? What's the research today? It was just going to be for me, but it quickly became such an enticing, vast subject that I was like, Oh man, maybe it, maybe this can be my next book. And what I did was I divided, I decided I would do it for a year. Um, because a year felt long enough that you could have actual change but not so long that you couldn't see the end of it. And I divided my life basically where I thought I could be happier into 12 themes. And then I gave myself concrete, manageable resolutions within each theme about things that I was reading or that were, were proposed as things that would make you happier. And so um everything from like, you know, get enough sleep, you know, from that to like things like imitate a spiritual master. So from the very concrete to the very transcendent. So it was all about can you make yourself happier? Can I make myself happier? It was me as guinea pig, sort of talking about my own experiences, what I tried, what worked for me. And so that was The Happiness Project. Yeah.

ALIA: What a just, beautiful thing. I'm just glad it exists in the world.

GRETCHEN: Oh well thank you. Oh, it's such a fun book to write.

ALIA: Yeah, well we just need more, more things like that right now today. So it seems like, okay, something Bob and I talk about a lot is like just the desire that we both have to sort of master technology and for technology not to run our lives, but for us to sort of be able to run technology.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. It's a great servant and a bad master for sure.

ALIA: Yes. Well said.

GRETCHEN: Yeah

ALIA: And something personally, I feel like I have not figured out yet, but I feel like I'm sitting across from someone who might have figured it out. Do you think that's true?

GRETCHEN: Um, I just don't feel like it bothers me. I don't think that it's because I've been so clever about figuring it out. I feel like for whatever reason, it doesn't get in my head the way that it does some other people.

ALIA: I'm just fascinated by that. Like the fact that it somehow doesn't get into your head

GRETCHEN: Okay. So quick overview of the tendencies and I will say if you, most people know what they are from just this quick overview. There is a quiz online, 2 million people have taken the quiz and it will give you an answer if you want an answer. But again, most people don't even need to take the 11 questions for the quiz and that's at [quiz.gretchenrubin.com](http://quiz.gretchenrubin.com). So the four tendencies are upholder, questioner, obliger and rebel. And what it's looking at is how you respond to expectations, which sounds like a very sort of narrow thing, but it ends up being quite significant in your life and in other people's lives. So we all face two kinds of expectations: outer expectations, which are things like a work deadline or a request from a friend, and then there are inner expectations, my own desire to keep a New Year's resolution, my own desire to get back into meditation, just things that I want from myself.

ALIA: So for those of you who are like me and tend to roll their eyes at this stuff, I get it. But as someone who usually HATES personality tests, I actually buy this one. It's beyond a BuzzFeed quiz.

GRETCHEN: So depending on how you meet outer and inner, that's what determines your tendency. Upholder, questioner, obliger, rebel. So upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet the work deadline, they keep the New Year's resolution without much fuss. They want to know what other people expect from them, but their expectations for themselves are just as important. So their motto is "discipline is my freedom." Then there are questioners, questioners question all expectations. They'll do something if they think it makes sense. So they hate anything arbitrary, ineffective, irrational. They always have to have a reason. So they're making everything an inner expectation. If it meets their inner standard, they'll do it no problem. If it fails their inner standard, they will push back. So their motto is "I'll comply if you convince me why." Then there are obligers. Obligers readily meet outer expectations but they struggle to meet inner expectations. And I got my insight into this tendency when a friend said, I don't understand, like I, I'm, I'm happier when I exercise. And in high school I was on the track team and I never missed track practice. So why can't I go running now? Well, it's when she had a team and a coach expecting her to show up, she did it. No problem. When she's trying to go on her own, she struggles--they need outer accountability to meet even inner expectations. So they need outer accountability for outer and inner. Their motto, therefore, is "you can count on me and I'm counting on you to count on me." And then finally, rebels. Rebels resist all expectations, outer and inner alike. They want to do what they wanna do in their own way, in their own time. They can do anything they want to do, anything they choose to do, but if you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to push back. And typically they don't like to tell themselves what to do. Like they wouldn't sign up for a 10am spin class on Saturday cause they're like, I just want to wake up on Saturday and like see what I

feel like doing. Um, and their motto is “you can't make me and neither can I.” Um, and rebel is the smallest tendency and obliher is the biggest tendency.

ALIA: Really?

GRETCHEN: And if you want me to do the Game of Thrones characters, I can do the Game of Thrones characters. I can do Parks and Recreation, you know, I can do, yeah, I can do...

ALIA: Who is Leslie Knope?

GRETCHEN: What do you think? She's very obvious.

ALIA: An upholder?

GRETCHEN: 100%.

ALIA: Yes!

GRETCHEN: Obviously an upholder. Who else is an upholder?

ALIA: Who?

GRETCHEN: Chris.

ALIA: Oh my God.

GRETCHEN: The boss. The one who, uh, is the health freak.

ALIA: Yes, of course he is.

GRETCHEN: And he like, remember how, um, when Leslie was gonna like she wanted to get together with, I forget Ben.

ALIA: Yeah

GRETCHEN: And he's like, I'm sorry. These are the rules. Like I can't, what am I going to do? The rules are the rules. Like he, that's so upholder to be like I can't, you know, anyway, so yeah. Once you see that, once you know about them, you see them in the world and how they play out. Very commonly these are not subtle. And they really do affect how you would speak to somebody in order to get them to do what you want. If that's the great challenge of adult life is how do we get other people to do what I want? And also how to get yourself to do what you want. Cause often rebels will say things like, I don't understand what's wrong with me? Why can't I use a to do list like every other adult? And I'm like, no, that's just a rebel thing. Rebels

often don't like to do lists or you know, questioners are like, what's wrong with people? Why are they just these lemmings that just go along with anything that anybody tells them to do? Why? Like I, how is it that I'm the only one who's asking this question? Like, and their teacher say, you ask too many questions when they're little and you know, so, um, you see that you start to see them all around you. Yeah.

ALIA: Ah, this is what I'm going to do all day.

GRETCHEN: Do you know what you guys are, what do you guys think you are?

ALIA: Well, I know what I am.

GRETCHEN: Ooh, what are you.

ALIA: I don't like it though.

GRETCHEN: Why? Ooh, they're all good. They're all good!

ALIA: I know. Well, I think I'm an obliger.

GRETCHEN: But that's the biggest tendency. That is type O. That is-- okay.

ALIA: But I'm also an upholder in so many ways. Like at work, I feel like I compartmentalize my life a lot. Like right now, especially, so at work I feel like I'm an upholder.

GRETCHEN: Okay. But see, if you're an up, what you're saying is, I'm, I'm an obliger except that I'm an upholder when I have outer accountability. And that means you're an obliger.

ALIA: Gretchen just...she just called me out.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. So that is, yeah, believe me I thought about it so much. But the thing is, so many of the greatest people in the world are obligers. Tiger Woods is an obliger. Andre Agassi's an obliger. Oprah's an obliger. Diana's an obliger. Jon, Jon Snow is an obliger. Sir Jamie Lannister's an obliger.

ALIA: I'm feeling a lot better now.

GRETCHEN: Daenerys Targaryen is an obliger. She had a little thing at the end there, but uh you know, now a lot, if they're type O, it pairs up the best with the other three tendencies. Uh, they make great team members, great leaders. I've had people say to me, they only want to hire obligers. They want to screen for obliger and..

ALIA: Okay I'm going to go ahead and own this then.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, it's good. It's, and it's the biggest one. Like you're in great company. But yeah. What about you?

BOB: I told you I was a rebel yesterday, but I actually, I'm more of a questioner than a rebel.

ALIA: I was going to say I didn't buy the rebel thing because...yeah.

GRETCHEN: Um, if somebody, here's a good test because questioner, all the tendencies overlap with two tendencies. So obliger overlaps with upholder and it overlaps with rebel. So there's deep affinities. So often people are like, am I a questioner or rebel? Cause those overlap. So there's a deep affinity there and the way to tell the difference is. If I tell you to do something, are you more thinking, why should I or are you thinking, you're not the boss of me?

BOB: So because I know rebels, as because I'm a musician...

GRETCHEN: Ahh.

BOB: ...and every musician is a rebel. I'm, I'm, I'm not the person. Some musicians I know.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: If you say, would you play this song, they will not, not, not only not play the song that night. They wouldn't play it for the next month.

GRETCHEN: Right.

BOB: So, and I'm not that person.

GRETCHEN: Okay.

BOB: If you convinced me it's a good idea.

GRETCHEN: Okay. Sounds like a questioner.

BOB: I'm more of a questioner, but I also definitely only want to wake up on Saturday and do whatever I want.

GRETCHEN: But the questioner, but you might be like, because it might be more efficient for me to go to the farmer's market today because I'm having company and so therefore I will, you know what I mean? What's interesting is that you can't look at someone's behavior often and judge their tendency because people can do the same thing, but they have different reasons. So like for instance, I'm an upholder and I have a friend who is a rebel and we both eat super low

carb, but I eat low carb because like I like the rules and I believe in the system and I, I get a lot of satisfaction of like, kind of like checking every box and doing it just right and he's a rebel cause he's like, I'm not a sucker. I'm not being controlled by the big food companies. I don't believe with the FDA says, you know, they can't control me. They can't addict me with their, you know, their processed foods. Like I'm not, you know, I'm not listening to their commercials, you know, so he does it in a rebellious way. Now if you look at us from the outside, we look identical in terms of how we eat. But our mental space is very different. So you, you have to know what, and this is why it's hard. Sometimes people will say, well, look at this person from the outside and tell their tendency. Sometimes you can tell and sometimes there's enough information about someone that you can judge, but you can't just see a few data points and tell because it could be coming from different places. Or like obligers and upholders in many contexts, they look identical. You have to really get into it to be able to tell them apart.

ALIA: Yeah, I buy that.

GRETCHEN: That was what the quiz was really hard to do because you had to distinguish between all four. Even though they all overlap.

BOB: You have voices for each of these? I like them.

GRETCHEN: Oh

ALIA: It's really funny.

GRETCHEN: Oh yeah. Well I hope they're all good. I love all the tendencies.

ALIA: What does an obliger sound like?

GRETCHEN: An obli- no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I can't do anything.

ALIA: Can't do it on command.

BOB: We'll make you do it later. Okay so I am so excited to have this next part of the conversation.

ALIA: Coming up after the break, Gretchen tells us how all of the four tendencies use tech to unhack their lives. And there are definitely some ideas I wanna steal. So stay tuned.

[AD BREAK]

BOB: Into this schema you have...

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: ...drop a smartphone...

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: ..that tings at you with a thousand times a day.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: How do each of these characters react to that?

GRETCHEN: Okay. So I think I'm very typical as an upholder, which is like, it's very easy for me to turn it off. It's very easy for me to ignore it. If I'm like, I need to focus, I can't look at my phone. That feels like something that I can ignore because my inner expectation, is that I need to, I need to read, I need to, you know, uh, go for a walk, I need to, you know, whatever it is, I, so it's easy for me to ignore it. But it's also a question, and this is true for all the tendencies, is people have different values and they have different kinds of belief systems. And that comes into play. So I was talking to a, actually a guy, uh, military guy who was an upholder and he was saying, oh, well, one of the reasons why I find, this was like three or four years ago, one of the reasons I find Facebook so burdensome is I have to like everything that everybody posts. And I was like, no, you don't. And like he had decided that was the rule. And so he felt an extreme like, like that he needed to meet that expectation for himself where as I was just like, man, I don't, I don't feel that expectation. So part of it is that people have different ideas. Some people are like, you can't leave dishes in the sink overnight. I'm like, you can totally leave dishes in the sink overnight. So I would meet the inner expectation if I had it but I just don't have it, which is how you can get slacker upholders. Not all upholders are type A, they can be slackers, they can meet their sta... they can meet every expectation for themselves, but they just have very low expectations. So.

ALIA: Wow, I didn't think about that. Okay.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. So questioners, questioners probably have an, they have an easier time with something like this cause it's all about efficiency. Does this work for me? Like, and they tend to like to customize things and hack things. So I would anticipate that many questioners would find it pretty easy to find ways to do workarounds. However, questioners also are very drawn to data and research and information. And they can get analysis paralysis, which is where they want more and more information. And so for some questioners, something like the Internet is more of a burden where like if I'm gonna buy a tent, I want to do more and more and more research. So it's sort of like the endless, the endless supply of information is very burdensome to them. But if they were like, I need to shut off the phone from 6 to 9 pm so I can spend quality time with my family, that probably wouldn't be that hard for a questioner because they understand why they're doing it. And they do love to customize typically. They like to make things right for them. And so something like, I'm gonna change my notifications. That would make a lot of sense to a questioner. It's like, just because notifications work for you, I don't know

that they're going to work for me. Obligers, this is hard because if they feel like everyone's clamoring for their attention, they're going to find it very painful to ignore that because it's like someone texted me, I have to text back. Somebody emailed me, I need to read that email right away. Somebody calling me, I have to pick up. Someone's expecting me to like their Instagram post. I need to like it. Like these things add up.

ALIA: I don't know what you're talking about.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But so here's something that obligers can do. Um, there's many ways to create outer accountability. One of the quick things that obligers can always do is to remember if you say yes to someone, you have to say no to someone else. And so you could say, look, people are, you know, I'm getting all these texts and emails from the office between six and nine, but my family and I, we have talked about how it's important for us to have quality time and therefore to say yes to my family, I'm going to say no to the office or like, you know, um, and so because part of the time obligers feel like I have to say yes, but it's like no, you have to say no too, who do you say no to? And a lot of times when they formulate it that way, it's easier for them to make choices. But when the thing about tech is it feels, it feels kind of like, oh, you could just do this in 10 seconds. Why wouldn't you just do this right now? Why wouldn't you just do this right now? And like 10 seconds becomes five hours. We've all experienced that.

ALIA: Yeah. It's deceptive.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. And then for... rebels can do whatever they want to do. So like they want to do it, they'll do it. They don't want to do it, they don't want to do it. It's like, what do you want? And so if a rebel wants to change because often they get frustrated because they want to change something. But the minute they tried to make a rule from themselves, they want to break it. So in, a rebel would not do well doing something like from six to nine, I'm not going to be on my, on my phone. Because that's scheduling that makes them feel trapped. So what works for rebels is identity. What kind of person am I? How do I want to be in the world? And they are also very, uh, put a very high value on freedom and choice. So things like I'm not a slave to my phone. I'm not controlled by email. You can't make me answer your Instagram. I'm free. I need time to reflect. I need time to exercise. I had, I need time to rewatch, you know, Parks and Recreation. And so, you know, it's just like, if I'm going to be who I am, like I just have to like, you know, put my phone down and walk away from it. Because when they tie it into their identity, it's much easier for them to do something. Rules don't work for them, whereas it rule might work really well for an obliger or for a questioner or an upholder.

ALIA: So illuminating.

BOB: You have just made, um, the last five years of my life make sense.

GRETCHEN: Oh good! Like, tell me why, tell me why.

BOB: You have.

GRETCHEN: Really?

BOB: Because I write about all of this overwhelmedness and technology, right,

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: And I don't know, I'm gonna make up a number 67, 70% of the time people are like, thank God someone's finally talking about this. The world is so complicated. I'm so overwhelmed.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: But one third of the time ish, people were like, what are you talking about?

GRETCHEN: Interesting.

BOB: Um, so I think I'm talking just to one set of people.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: I'm talking just to obligers...

ALIA: Wow.

BOB: I'm not talking to everybody.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: Nobody else really seems to have much of a problem with this, whereas this, this one set of people...

GRETCHEN: But see, it's interesting that you say that because obligers, because obliger is such a big group, people often assume that it's everyone because, and the way, one of the reasons that I got the insight into the upholder tendency was I was speaking to a journalist and she said, why is it the busy parents like us can ever take time for ourselves?

GRETCHEN: And I said, actually I have no trouble taking time for myself. And she said, actually neither do I. And I'm like, well then why, what is the premise of your article? Because you and I are both busy parents and neither one of us have experienced this.

ALIA: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: So clearly it's not a universal thing. So what's going on there? And that's when I was like, just because everybody feels something like it's always you have to say, do I feel this? Now I think sometimes people conflate it. Like feeling overwhelmed by email is a shorthand for saying, I'm overwhelmed by all the tasks that people at work want me to do. It doesn't matter if it's email, like Instagram is an internet only problem. Tasks that being pestered at work for people who want you to do things and want your attention and what, yeah, that's just inherent in work. And like it'll just take whatever form it takes. It's like that's, that's really a work problem. But then there are some things about being overwhelmed by technology that are truly created or so dramatically amplified that they're changed by technology. Yeah.

ALIA: I'm so intrigued by this. It just makes me think about my husband who I'm like...

GRETCHEN: Ooh, what's your husband? Okay. Can I say something though before you say that?

ALIA: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Okay. If there is a rebel in work, like in a founding team or in romance, if one is a rebel, the other one is almost always an obliger.

ALIA: Really?

GRETCHEN: So if you are married to a rebel, I'm not surprised.

ALIA: Well, I don't know now. So this is the thing that I was going to describe

GRETCHEN: But, but, obligers match up with everybody. So you can be matched with everybody.

ALIA: I think he's a questioner.

GRETCHEN: Oh, okay.

ALIA: Here's why

GRETCHEN: I'm married to a questioner. Yeah.

ALIA: Uh, interesting.

ALIA: So loves to customize his technology and he agonizes about buying anything, and it drives me insane. I'm like, why do we have 29 tabs open on the dog mattress?

GRETCHEN: That's analysis paralysis. Okay. Let me ask you this question. This is not true of all questioners, but it is, it is often found in questioners. Do you find that he does not like to answer questions in a way that's super annoying?

ALIA: Yes.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

ALIA: Gets a little defensive.

GRETCHEN: This is a questioner thing. How about you? Are you, you're a questioner.

BOB: I'm all of those things.

GRETCHEN: Okay.

BOB: I, I just spent 10 months buying a new car.

GRETCHEN: There you go. Yeah. A rebel...

BOB: I'm also super happy with it.

GRETCHEN: But right.

BOB: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Right. Um, yeah, there's good, of these things have strengths and kind of the, and the corresponding weaknesses. One is like you got exactly the car you wanted you did the research. The other thing is it took 10 months. Being married to a questioner or you get the benefit of that, but then you also sort of have to put up with it. And it's like, same thing with obligers. It's like none is better than the others.

ALIA: Right.

GRETCHEN: It's just that you have to take into account how you might get in your own way or like how it could cause conflict among people. Like an upholder will often find an upholder cold, cause they're like, I don't understand like, we have guests in town. How is it that you're going on a 15 mile run? And an upholder would be like but I'm training for the marathon. Like I can't, like what are you, what are you going to do? You know, to an obliger that's like Ooh that's cold. Or oh I made you this birthday cake. And I'm like, oh I can't eat that. You know, cause I don't eat sugar. Like the fact that you made it, especially for me like, oh, well that was a nice gesture, but I'm not going to eat it. Right. And then obligers are like, oh my gosh that is cold.

ALIA: You see, me as an obliger. I immediately just have so much respect for that and I'm like, oh my God. Sort of almost like envy. It borderlines on envy.

GRETCHEN: Okay. So here's the thing, if you're an obliger and you want to look more like an upholder which many obligers say they want to do, all you would need is outer accountability. Cause you can do anything you want with outer accountability. So let me give you a couple, like what I think are hilarious examples in a specific area where people use tech to solve it. So the problem is you need outer accountability to wake up on time in the morning. You live by yourself. What do you do? So what is the solution for it? And these were two people who for whom the snooze alarm was just like did not work. The snooze alarm doesn't work. For some people it just makes things worse and worse doesn't help, doesn't serve it. So one obliger used the social media management platform Hootsuite to set up a very embarrassing Facebook post that automatically posts every morning at 7:30 AM unless she gets up to disable it. So there's a solution, a tech solution, right?

ALIA: Oh my god.

GRETCHEN: She's like, oh my gosh, I gotta get up, I gotta, I gotta get that thing off.

ALIA: So ridiculous.

GRETCHEN: So another person on her phone, she slept with her...

BOB: That's amazing.

GRETCHEN: I know. Is that, I mean, the ingenuity!

BOB: That totally makes sense. That totally makes sense.

GRETCHEN: The ingenuity.

ALIA: Would it just like say something like she didn't wake up this morning.

GRETCHEN: No no, I don't know what, she didn't say what it was, but it was embarrassing enough to get her up. You know.

ALIA: That's amazing.

GRETCHEN: Another one was, so this person had a dog named Elsa and Elsa slept on the bed on the floor next to her. And so she changed the alarm on her phone to be a recording of her voice saying, Elsa, do you want to go for a walk? Elsa, do you want to go for a walk? And so Elsa would jump on the bed and be like, yes, I do.

ALIA: That is amazing.

GRETCHEN: Isn't this amazing?

ALIA: Genius.

GRETCHEN: But again, but see this is the thing because this is the thing for obligers. It's not that hard to create things, create outer accountability. Sometimes it does take a little imagination and ingenuity. Obligers are very different in what they respond to. So for some obligers, it's really useful to pay for something. Like, if I pay for an exercise class, I'm going to go. Other obligers, it's almost like it makes them feel like they're off the hook. Like, well, I paid for it. So it's like same differ- you know, and I'm like, so if it's not working for you, you have to move on. For some people they get like an auto, an auto text from an app would make them feel, um, uh, uh, accountable. But some people need like an actual person to, who they feel accountable for. And so it's interesting when there's tons of apps that are meant to help people with their habits and you see how they are...some are doing a better job in it or worse job of meeting all four tendencies. And some are very specific to a specific tendency and what works for that tendency. And so knowing your tendency, you can pick the thing that's going to respond...what you're going to respond best to. For instance, rebels really don't like being told what to do or reminded. And there's a, um, what is the, uh, I'm just blanking on the name. It's a, it's a, it's a language learning.

ALIA: Oh, like, um, like Babel?

Gretchen: Yeah. Or like Duolingo.

ALIA: Or Duolingo.

GRETCHEN: I think it's Duolingo, but that the rebels were mentioning, but anyway, one of them sends autoresponse, reminders. Like, you haven't learned your word in Spanish today. And they're like, you can't tell me what to do. I'm not going to learn. I'm not gonna learn that word. And it's like, okay, but you, so that's not working for you. You know, if you're a rebel, the notification doesn't work. An obliger that might work really well.

ALIA: Oh, I love them.

GRETCHEN: Oh my gosh. Yeah. See, so you have to know yourself and set things up. But technology can, the four tendencies can use it um to their advantage. Um, once you know. Yeah.

ALIA: This is so empowering. Like just, you know, get to know yourself a little bit better and then figure out how tech can work for you through that lens...

GRETCHEN: Yes.

ALIA: ...rather than just randomly like sort of shot in the dark. I'm just trying to turn everything, turn all the notifications on or turn them all off, which is what I feel like most people do.

GRETCHEN: Well, I think what happens with tech is that a lot of times people are like, this is best way, this is the most efficient way. This is the right way. Research shows this is how you should have it and then it doesn't work for you. And you're like, well, what's wrong with me? It's like, well, there's nothing wrong with you. It's just that this research showed what works for most people or what a lot of people are having success with, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's going to work for you. And I think sometimes people are like, they blame themselves rather than thinking things could be set up in a way that's better for me.

ALIA: I definitely blamed myself. But yeah, now I'm feeling empowered.

GRETCHEN: For obligers knowing that what they need is outer accountability is... So this woman just the other day, this is not tech related, but it's good for an obliger. She realized she needed outer accountability and one thing we talk about is that children are really good police and you can do things like, let's say you have to work on a book proposal. You could say to your kids, if I'm not working on my book proposal, you don't have to do your homework. And then they will watch you like a hawk.

ALIA: Wow

GRETCHEN: And they're like, I think you should take a day off today, mom. You know, whatever. So she said, I realized, she's like, my children are very vigilante minded. Um, there were seven and five. And so she told them, I'm not going to eat potato chips, but if I do, if you catch me eating potato chips, you can write on my face with a sharpie.

ALIA: Oh my god.

GRETCHEN: And she's like, has a job where she's constantly giving presentations and she said I was scared straight. So again, it's like, it's so ingenious.

ALIA: It's brilliant.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. So.

ALIA: Gosh, I love it.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Well, you know, calendars really work well for upholders. Upholders are very, very calendar driven. That's one of the reasons they can seem rigid to the other tendencies because it's very hard for them to deviate from a ca, from a calendar. Um, and so like, they will be looking at that thing all day long um.

ALIA: So my friend who puts, sleep on his calendar...

GRETCHEN: Sure. Absolutely. I totally get that.

ALIA: Is an upholder.

GRETCHEN: 100%.

ALIA: Interesting.

GRETCHEN: So they did an interesting, and this is me kind of extrapolating, so I'm going to go, I'm just going to go rogue here for a minute. So there was this interesting research that I read about when somebody was looking at uh Facebook and they were saying that they were surprised to see that if you look at people who were scoring high on conscientiousness, which I think is upholder, um, they were often using words like leisure and weekend. And I thought when I was like, I am not surprised by that because upholders are very good about saying things like, well I need to take time to do yoga or I need to take a weekend with my friends or I need to turn off my phone from 6 to 9 pm or I need to go to bed at 10:30. And so to me it makes sense that an upholder would talk about things like that.

BOB: Inbox zero people.

GRETCHEN: Oh my gosh. Okay.

BOB: Yeah. Um.

ALIA: Wait, are you an inbox zero person?

BOB: I'm the dramatic opposite of an inbox zero person.

ALIA: Okay, I am an inbox zero person.

BOB: My inbox has 35,000 emails in it.

ALIA: Oh, I'm so stressed.

BOB: Yes just me saying that probably bothered you, right?

ALIA: Okay.

GRETCHEN: Have you thought about inbox bankruptcy or whatever it's called?

BOB: Yeah. Well, I've had to do that many times in my life.

ALIA: What is inbox bankruptcy?

BOB: I just select all delete, boom. I'm at inbox zero.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, yeah.

BOB: That's, I mean that's a sort of regular practice for me.

GRETCHEN: You've done it and you still have 35,000?

BOB: Yeah. I get a lot of email.

ALIA: Bob, wow.

BOB: And I mean, but the thing is, I remember telling somebody once, I would do a story about ATM fees and I'd get 2,000 emails.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: Because people are so angry about this.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: And I would read like a sample of them.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: And, and scan a lot. I would actually spend a lot of time on it. Like an hour or two, but you know, after an hour I'd be like, okay, I've got enough.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: It was like, what about all those other people you didn't respond to? Like, do you think they all expect me to respond to them?

GRETCHEN: Right.

BOB: I'm not hurting their feelings.

GRETCHEN: Right. See this is very questioner cause it's just like why would I do it? Right. Yeah.

BOB: But, but for some people, like they would just never leave the office ever again.

GRETCHEN: Right. Exactly. They would feel an enormous, um, I'm fascinated by this. So do you, why don't you just delete them then, why do you leave them there?

ALIA: That's exactly what I want to know.

BOB: Because it is my big data, I mean all the time I say, oh wait and...

GRETCHEN: Interesting. So you're using an almost like a catalog of response.

BOB: Yes. Um, I...somebody assigns me a story on...

GRETCHEN: ATM fees.

BOB: Yeah. And I CTRL+F my email and I find potential victims.

GRETCHEN: I feel like, what I feel like is that there's no magic one size fits all solution. And then in that for so many it like, but I think that we are sort of trained to think, well, if we only did the research, we would find the best way, the right way, the most efficient way, and if we would all do that and do the same, whatever's best I've been, you know, you see bosses say like, well a cluttered desk means a cluttered mind so we're gonna have a clean desk policy in this office, and that just doesn't work for everyone. Not everybody wants to work that way.

ALIA: No.

GRETCHEN: And then there are people who are like, well, just leave everything out. And it's like, okay, well that's got a downside too. So yeah. I wrote a book, *Outer Order, Inner Calm* and like the first thing that I say, because people are like, well, where do you start? And I say, d- don't start by saying I'm going to get organized. Don't get organized, get rid of everything. It's like get rid of everything you don't need, don't use, don't love. And a lot of times you're just left with like three pieces of paper and you don't need to organize it. But see, I would say do that. Don't put it in a box and then go through it and see. But everybody's different. Everybody's different.

BOB: Yeah, yeah.

GRETCHEN: But don't get organized. Absolutely.

BOB: I could not live the way that I do in a pre technology world.

GRETCHEN: Interesting. Are you scanning tons of stuff or?

BOB: Well, like for example, the 35,000, if they were letters, I couldn't control-F them to find a victim.

GRETCHEN: Right.

BOB: They would have to have been organized in some ways.

GRETCHEN: Exactly.

BOB: So...

ALIA: That's interesting.

GRETCHEN: And you'd need a whole huge office to supply to store them.

BOB: So like con control F sort of means folders aren't important anymore.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: In a brand new way.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: So I wish I could control F my house. I actually have that impulse often when I walk in, I need something in like my first urge is control...oh, no it's...

GRETCHEN: There should be a Black Mirror episode on that.

ALIA: That'd be great.

GRETCHEN: That is so obviously true.

BOB: I have a burning question.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

ALIA: Do it

BOB: Every single time we do this, the same topic comes up, which is, has tech really changed anything...

GRETCHEN: Oooh

BOB:...or is it just like a coat of paint on an old problem?

GRETCHEN: Yes!

BOB: And my version of that question for you, which I think I probably already know your answer, but I want to hear,

GRETCHEN: I don't know what my answer is. Okay. What? Yeah.

BOB: I mean you've suggested that these qualities are endemic in people.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

BOB: And they really kinda can't change.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

BOB: Can technology change? Cause I feel like technology and all the alerts and everything, like they've kind of hacked our brains to get our attention, can it push more people into being obligers who might not be obligers?

GRETCHEN: I don't think so. I really believe, I'm a big believer in the genetic roots of personality. And so I'm a big believer that, you know, a lot of this stuff is hardwired in us. But I definitely think that it's true that technology can amplify certain aspects. Just the way, like social comparisons, social comparison is clearly, it's like a, it's a personality characteristic that some people have more than others. And definitely if you have social comparison, social media is gonna wildly, amplify that quality in you. It was there already, but now it's like, it's like, it can be expressed so much more, colorfully and vividly and like in it, you know, in a way that it was kind of inconceivable before. It was in you before. But it's just fine. So I think, you know, so if, if you're, if you are whatever your tendencies or if you're a rebel, you might feel like everybody's just constantly ordering me around because everything feels like it's telling you, look at, somebody said to me, Oh, if somebody sends me an email like important, please read, I immediately delete it. You know what I mean? It's like a rebel. It's like people are constantly like trying to tell me what to do cause it, cause technology is kind of like, look at me, open me, check this out, watch this. You know, they could that, that could make them feel more like that. Obligers the way more questioners, all this information coming at me. How am I going to process it? I need to come up. You have a very well thought out approach and then but like everybody needs what's my approach to email going to be, I need a philosophy. I need to do the

research. What's best? So I think it can play into your tendency, but it probably isn't changing your tendency. And it can also probably be a solution for any problem with your tendency. It can help solve it. If you're experiencing frustrations.

BOB: We'll talk about that as their next products.

GRETCHEN: Yes, good good good, Yeah, absolutely.

ALIA: This was great. Gretchen, thank you so much for coming in.

GRETCHEN: Thank you! So much fun to talk to you. Thanks for having me.

BOB: Thank you Gretchen.

ALIA: This conversation with Gretchen gave me a lot of hope. Like a lot of hope that I don't think I've felt in a really long time. Technology isn't all bad. It's not. It's a tool that can be used to unhack ourselves. It's a tool that can be used for our happiness! It's a tool that can be used to make our lives easier, to actually make ourselves happier, even if it's just a little bit. This season on So, Bob, we're trying to find one of the happier corners of the internet. What are the parts of technology that are really doing something good for us? We're gonna talk about all kinds of things, from Dungeons and Dragons, where I'm gonna actually go play my very first campaign of Dungeons and Dragons. We're gonna talk about love and texting, and how texting has made our relationships so much better, and a lot more fun. And Bob's gonna answer your questions. We've been gathering and going through all of the great questions you've sent over the summer, we've read every single one of them I promise. And Bob's gonna answer one of them. And then at the end of season 2, we're bringing you a special ad-free series on privacy. You don't wanna miss it.

[AD BREAK]

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So Bob is a spoke media production.

It's hosted by me Alia Tavakolian and Bob Sullivan.

Thanks to this week's guest Gretchen Rubin. You can follow Gretchen on Twitter @gretchenrubin. That's G-R-E-T-C-H-E-N R-U-B-I-N.

We're produced by Kelly Kolff with help from Reyes Mendoza, Tre Jones, and our intern, Kendall Lake.

This episode was mixed by Alexander Mark.

Our head of post production is Will Short.

The songs you hear in this episode come from FirstCom.

Our executive producer is Keith Reynolds.

Thanks for listening!