# Episode Book

EPISODE #5490

# Why Screen Protectors Bubble Every Time

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## SYNOPSIS

Almost everyone has tried to install a tempered glass screen protector, and almost everyone has ended up with bubbles. The frustrating part is that it looks trivial — a flat sheet of glass on a flat sheet of glass — yet it defeats a huge fraction of the population. This episode digs into why. The answer turns out to be a dust-management problem wearing a glass costume: pressure-sensitive adhesive only microns thick, an oleophobic coating actively resisting the bond, and humidity trapping water that looks exactly like trapped air. Along the way we cover the four-step framework that separates a clean install from a ruined one — environment, surface prep, dust removal, application — including the free bathroom-humidity trick, why side lighting is your only real diagnostic tool, why dust stickers aren't optional, and why sliding the protector even a millimeter is the mistake you can't undo.

# TRANSCRIPT



**Corn**

...which is the same reason a paint job fails, right? You spend all the money on the paint and none on the tape, and then you wonder why the edges look like that.



**Herman**

The tape is the whole job. Nobody believes it until they've done it.



**Corn**

Well, our friend Daniel has been thinking about tape. Sort of. He wrote in about tempered glass screen protectors. Almost everyone who's owned a phone has tried to put one of these on. It looks trivial. It's a little sheet of glass, it ships with an alcohol wipe and a microfiber cloth, and the guy in the YouTube video does it in ninety seconds with one hand while he's talking.



**Herman**

He's done it four hundred times.



**Corn**

And then you try it, and the glass never sits quite right, and there are always those tiny bubbles. Daniel's point is that this is a good teaching case for precision work generally. His words: it's about "not just attention to detail, but sometimes also having a few basic pieces of gear in place to get it right the first time." Even something as basic as an isopropyl spray bottle, a decent microfiber, and good lighting.



**Herman**

He's right, and I want to say why he's right before we get into it.



**Corn**

There's a lot to unpack. Where do you want to start?



**Herman**

Start with the fact that it shouldn't be hard. That's the part that bothers people. It's a flat piece of glass going onto a flat piece of glass. There's no skill in it, there's no craft in the traditional sense, and yet it defeats a huge fraction of the population.



**Corn**

Including me, and I have claws, so I have an excuse.



**Herman**

You have several excuses.



**Corn**

I have a whole folder of them.



**Herman**

Here's the thing though. The protector isn't sticking to your screen the way tape sticks to paper. It's a pressure-sensitive adhesive, a PSA layer, and on most of these it's only a few microns thick. What it has to do is wet the surface. It has to flow into every microscopic irregularity in the glass and make full contact, and when it does that, the bond is optically clear because there's no gap for light to bounce around in.



**Corn**

So the adhesive is essentially behaving like a very slow liquid.



**Herman**

And it's being asked to do that across an area the size of a playing card while being thinner than a human hair. Now put one dust particle under it.



**Corn**

How small are we talking?



**Herman**

Fifty microns becomes a visible defect. That's about the width of a human hair, or a bit less. A particle as small as five hundredths of a millimeter will do it. Skin cells do it. A stray fiber off your microfiber cloth does it.



**Corn**

The cloth that came in the box to help you.



**Herman**

The cloth that came in the box to help you, yes. And the mechanism is what makes it so maddening. The particle sits there like a tent pole. The adhesive can't wet around it, so it gets pushed up into a cone, and under that cone is trapped air. It's not a bubble in the sense of a soap bubble. It's a structural void with a dust particle holding the roof up.



**Corn**

A tent pole. That's the whole thing, isn't it. One grain of sand and you've built a little tent on your screen.



**Herman**

And the tent doesn't come down on its own. Small pure air pockets, the ones with nothing underneath them, those do dissipate over a day or so as the adhesive continues to flow and cure. But a bubble with a particle underneath it is permanent. The adhesive is pulling against the particle, and in some cases the bubble actually grows over time.



**Corn**

So the rule is: if there's something under it, it's forever.



**Herman**

If there's something under it, it's forever. And that's why the whole task is really a dust-management problem wearing a glass costume.



**Corn**

Which reframes the difficulty entirely. It's not that the glass is hard to place. It's that you're fighting an enemy you can't see, in a room you haven't thought about, with tools that came free in a cardboard sleeve.



**Herman**

And there's a second enemy, which is your own screen. Modern phones have an oleophobic coating. It's there to repel oil from your fingers, and it works by lowering the surface energy of the glass. Low surface energy is exactly what adhesives hate. So the screen is actively resisting the bond you're trying to form.



**Corn**

The phone is on the other side.



**Herman**

And then there's humidity. If it's a damp day, microscopic water droplets condense on the screen, and you get what look exactly like air bubbles but are actually liquid trapped under the adhesive seal. Same appearance, different cause, and no amount of pressing fixes them.



**Corn**

So we've got dust, we've got the coating, we've got water. What's the actual failure rate attribution? Because I've always assumed some of these protectors are just badly made.



**Herman**

That's the assumption to kill. One of the explainers puts it at ninety-five percent of bubble cases being technique or environment rather than a defective product. Their line is that even a fifty-dollar protector will bubble if a single grain of dust is present.



**Corn**

Ninety-five percent. That's a suspiciously round number, and it's coming from a source with an interest in the answer.



**Herman**

It is, and I'd hold it loosely. But the direction is right, and it's corroborated by the repair trade. Repair Mart's version is that bubbles almost never come from the glass itself. In nearly every case it's trapped air over a speck of dust, and the fix is preparation, not luck.



**Corn**

Preparation, not luck. There's the thesis of the episode and we're four minutes in.



**Herman**

There's a nice structural way to think about it. The good guides break it into four steps: environment, surface prep, dust removal, application. And the claim is that getting any one of those four wrong gets you trapped particles, edge bubbles, or a protector that lifts within a week.



**Corn**

Four steps, and the failure is a chain. Any link.



**Herman**

Any link. So let's do the environment, because that's the one nobody thinks about and it's the cheapest to fix.



**Corn**

The bathroom.



**Herman**

The bathroom. Run a hot shower for two to five minutes, close the door, and install in there. What you're doing is driving the humidity above sixty percent, and above sixty percent, airborne particles settle out of the air onto surfaces. It's the same principle commercial cleanroom operators use, just at home scale and for free.



**Corn**

So you're not making the room cleaner. You're making the air heavier.



**Herman**

You're making the dust fall out of the air before it can fall onto your screen. And it works. Multiple manufacturers put it in their own manuals, which tells you it isn't folklore.



**Corn**

I like that it's free. The single best intervention in this entire process costs nothing and requires you to do something you were going to do anyway.



**Herman**

Now, lighting. This is the diagnostic tool. You want side lighting. Hold the phone at an angle to a window or a lamp so the light rakes across the surface, and dust particles show up as bright dots or little shadows. You cannot clean what you cannot see, and under flat overhead light, a clean screen and a dirty screen look identical.



**Corn**

And the warnings here are specific. No direct sun?



**Herman**

No direct sun, because sunlight heats the surface and creates convection currents that carry dust right back onto it. And no forced-air vents. Don't do this under an air conditioning vent or a fan. You're not fighting the dust on the screen, you're fighting the dust in the room, and moving air delivers it continuously.



**Corn**

Turn the phone off, I assume.



**Herman**

Turn it off. A black screen shows dust far better than a lit one. And it stops you accidentally triggering things while you're pressing down.



**Corn**

What about the person doing the installing?



**Herman**

Non-shedding cotton. No fleece, no wool. Tie back long hair. Work on a hard surface, not your lap, because fabric sheds. And this is the one that gets people: wipe in single-direction strokes, not circles.



**Corn**

Why not circles? Circles feel thorough.



**Herman**

Circles redistribute the residue around the screen. You're smearing the oil and the dust into a thin film instead of lifting it off and pushing it to one edge. Single direction, top to bottom, and then you take a fresh part of the cloth and do it again.



**Corn**

So the cloth is a consumable, not a tool.



**Herman**

The cloth is a consumable. Use a fresh surface each pass.



**Corn**

And then you wait.



**Herman**

You wait about thirty seconds after the alcohol wipe for it to fully evaporate. If you go early, you're trapping alcohol vapor under the adhesive, which is its own version of the same problem.



**Corn**

Now the step I want to talk about, because I've watched people skip it in real time.



**Herman**

The dust sticker.



**Corn**

Little clear or blue adhesive squares. Everyone throws them aside.



**Herman**

Everyone throws them aside because they look like packaging. And it's the crucial step most guides skip. Wiping just moves particles around the surface. A dust sticker lifts them off entirely. You press it down, peel it up, and the particle goes with it.



**Corn**

So the wipe is for oil and the sticker is for particles.



**Herman**

The wipe is for oil and the sticker is for particles, and they are not interchangeable. One of the guides calls skipping the dust sticker the single most common mistake people make, and I believe it, because it's the step that looks like nothing.



**Corn**

If your kit doesn't have them?



**Herman**

Then the manufacturer is cutting corners. That's the line from one of the installation guides: if your kit is missing the alcohol wipe or the dust stickers, the manufacturer is skimping. And the argument is that if they're skimping on the consumables, they're probably skimping on the glass too.



**Corn**

That's a nice piece of reasoning, actually. The free stuff in the box is a tell.



**Herman**

It's a tell about the whole product. And you can substitute. Seventy percent isopropyl on a clean microfiber works as well as the wipe. And any clear tape works as a dust sticker. Scotch tape, masking tape, whatever's in the drawer.



**Corn**

Which brings us to technique. Because you can do all of that perfectly and still botch the placement.



**Herman**

Two methods. There's the alignment frame, and there's free-hand. The frame is the premium-kit feature. Spigen EZ Fit, ESR Armorite, Belkin all do versions of it. You clip a plastic jig onto the phone, drop the protector into the jig, and press. The frame handles alignment and it handles the contact angle, which is the thing that traps air.



**Corn**

How fast is that?



**Herman**

Well under sixty seconds. One of the guides calls it essentially foolproof, and I'd agree with that characterization. Spigen's two-pack with the frame runs about fourteen dollars.



**Corn**

Fourteen dollars for two attempts and a jig.



**Herman**

Two attempts and a jig. Which matters, because of the rescue problem we'll get to.



**Corn**

Free-hand, then.



**Herman**

Free-hand is two to three minutes if you're good. The technique is: pre-position the protector with the liner still on, so you can see how it sits. Then peel the bottom liner back halfway. Then lower the top edge onto a reference point. The earpiece cutout, the camera, the Dynamic Island, whichever your phone has. And then, critically, never slide it once the adhesive has made contact.



**Corn**

Because sliding drags dust.



**Herman**

Sliding drags dust and air to the trailing edge, and it does it in a way you can't undo. So you commit. You lower it like a lid, from one edge, and you let it fall into place. Then you press from the center outward, which pushes air toward the edges like a wave.



**Corn**

And if you get a dust particle anyway?



**Herman**

You lift one edge. Not the whole thing. One edge, using a piece of clear tape to get under it, then you go in with a dust sticker and grab the particle from underneath, then you re-press.



**Corn**

And the protector survives that?



**Herman**

Generally no. Tempered glass usually can't be reused cleanly after you lift it. So plan on using the spare from the two-pack. Which is why the two-pack isn't a marketing gimmick, it's the actual unit of purchase.



**Corn**

Two attempts is the honest quantity. Let me put the manufacturing side in, because I think it explains why the glass is almost never the problem. These protectors start as soda-lime glass, or aluminosilicate on the premium ones. They're cut to shape, the edges are ground, and then they're tempered. That means heated to somewhere around six hundred to six hundred fifty degrees Celsius and then rapidly cooled.



**Herman**

Which puts the surface into compression and the interior into tension, and that's what gives you the strength.



**Corn**

And then the adhesive stack goes on. It's called AB glue. There's a silicone layer that bonds to your phone screen, and an OCA layer, optical clear adhesive, that bonds to the tempered glass. And the silicone layer is the one that determines how well air can vent out from under the edges.



**Herman**

That's the air-release technology. The high-end ones have a micro-patterned adhesive grid, little channels that give trapped air somewhere to escape. That came out of professional vehicle vinyl wrapping, which is a much older discipline than phone protectors.



**Corn**

So the good ones are engineered to let air out, and the cheap ones aren't.



**Herman**

The good ones are engineered to let air out. And here's the number that should annoy everyone. These things are rated 9H hardness, which puts them roughly at the hardness of a masonry drill bit. And they can be ruined by a speck of dust five hundredths of a millimeter across.



### Corn

A drill bit that loses to a grain of sand. So that's the technical picture. Now I want to step back, because Daniel's actual claim is bigger than screen protectors. He's saying this is a teaching case for precision work in general.



### Herman

It is, and the cleanest statement of it comes from one of the installation guides: the difference is technique, not skill. That's the thesis. It's not that some people have steady hands and some people don't. It's that the outcome is determined by process and environment.



### Corn

Which is a liberating idea if you've ever stood over a phone with a bubble in it feeling like a failure.



### Herman

And it's testable. Look at the frame installs. The frame removes the two variables that free-hand technique leaves to judgment: alignment and contact angle. And the result is that a first-timer with a frame outperforms an experienced person without one, reliably.



### Corn

That's a strong claim.



### Herman

It's a strong claim and I'd defend it. The frame doesn't make you more careful. It makes your care irrelevant, because the thing you'd be careful about has been solved by geometry.



**Corn**

But I want to push on the ninety-five percent number, because I don't fully buy it.



**Herman**

Push.



**Corn**

The claim is that ninety-five percent of bubble failures are the user's fault, not the product's. And I notice who's making that claim. It's a source adjacent to the people selling the product. It's the same move every industry makes. The tool is fine, the operator is the problem.



**Herman**

That's a fair suspicion and I share part of it. But I'd separate the two claims. The mechanism is not in dispute. Dust under adhesive creates a permanent void. That's physics, not marketing. What's in dispute is the split. Is it ninety-five percent user error, or is it eighty, or is it seventy with a real tail of bad glass?



**Corn**

And the tail matters, because there are defective protectors.



**Herman**

There are. Bad adhesive lots, warped glass, contaminated packaging. That's real. What I'd say is that the ninety-five percent figure is directionally right and numerically soft. It's a useful prior, not a measurement.



**Corn**

A useful prior. I'll take that.



**Herman**

And notice it cuts the other way too. If ninety-five percent is user error, then the fix is cheap. You don't need a better protector. You need a bathroom and a roll of tape.



**Corn**

Which is a much better deal than it sounds, because the alternative is paying someone.



**Herman**

The alternative is paying someone. Apple Store will do a Belkin UltraGlass install for about thirty dollars total, protector included. Best Buy's Geek Squad is ten to fifteen plus the protector. So call it thirty to forty dollars, versus fourteen for a two-pack and a frame.



**Corn**

And the professional install is not guaranteed flawless either.



**Herman**

It's not, and I'd want to be honest about that. You're buying a better environment and a practiced hand. You're not buying certainty.



**Corn**

Now here's the counterpoint I want on the table, because it complicates the "just buy the gear" conclusion.



**Herman**

Go ahead.



**Corn**

There's a line from a commenter on Hacker News, godelski, that I keep thinking about. "Tools still require craftsmen, who understands: when they work, when they don't work." And then: "It is incredible how much complexity there is to things that appear so simple."



**Herman**

That's the right pushback. The gear helps, but the gear doesn't make the judgment. You still have to know that the bubble you're looking at has something under it, versus being a pure air pocket that'll be gone by tomorrow. You still have to know when to lift an edge and when to leave it alone.



**Corn**

And when to stop. That's the one nobody talks about. The person who keeps pressing and pressing and makes it worse.



**Herman**

The person who keeps pressing. Yeah. There's a real skill in recognizing that you've got a permanent one and it's time to peel and use the spare, versus the one that'll settle overnight.



**Corn**

How do you tell?



**Herman**

Roughly, location and appearance. A bubble at the very edge, small, with nothing visible at its center, is usually air and usually goes. A bubble with a visible dot at the center is a tent, and it's not going anywhere. That's the tell. Look for the dot.



**Corn**

That's a useful heuristic.



**Herman**

And there's another commenter, lproven, with the blunt version of the same idea: "professionals know to use the right tool for the job. Surgeons do not operate with chainsaws. Carpenters do not use axes."



**Corn**

Which is the frame argument in one line. Not "try harder." Use the tool that makes trying unnecessary.



**Herman**

And then bobjordan's version, which is about mastery. "A master craftsman with a set of metal working files has total, intimate control." But then he says the master "learns a new set of skills," and that "their vigilance is what turns reckless use of a new tool into an asset."



**Corn**

Vigilance. That's the word. Vigilance.



**Herman**

Vigilance plus gear. The gear is what you buy. The vigilance is what you bring.



**Corn**

Now let me do a debunk, because I think a lot of people are carrying a wrong idea into this.



**Herman**

The spray bottle.



**Corn**

The folklore is that you spray the screen with water or soapy water and the liquid lets the protector float into position, and then you squeegee it out and no bubbles. And that's true for film protectors. It's how vinyl wrap and window film go on.



**Herman**

It is not true for tempered glass.



**Corn**

The adhesive on these is not designed to be wetted. Water prevents it from bonding properly. You get hazing, and you get pooling, which looks exactly like a big stubborn bubble and is not one.



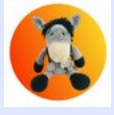
**Herman**

And that's the cruel part. You'd look at the pooling and think "I've got a bubble," and you'd press and press and press, and you'd be pressing on water that's sealed under a layer of adhesive.



**Corn**

The fix for the wrong problem.



**Herman**

So: alcohol on the screen, wipe it off, let it evaporate, and then dry install. No spray bottle.



**Corn**

Daniel mentioned an isopropyl spray bottle in his prompt, and I want to be fair to him, because that's the right substance used for the right step. That's prep, not wet-install.



**Herman**

He's using it to clean the screen, which is exactly what it's for.



**Corn**

Good. So let's pull the thread out to the general claim. Daniel's saying precision work isn't just attention to detail. It's attention to detail plus the right gear in place before you start.



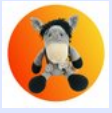
**Herman**

And I'd add a third term, which is environment. Because the gear is portable and the environment is the thing you have to arrange. You can buy a frame and a dust sticker for fourteen dollars. You cannot buy a dust-free room. You have to make one out of your bathroom.



**Corn**

Which is the most interesting part of this whole topic to me. The single highest-leverage intervention is a hot shower.



**Herman**

It's a hot shower and thirty seconds of patience with the alcohol wipe.



**Corn**

And it generalizes. Think about what the actual failure mode is here. It's not lack of care. It's that the worker can't see the problem. Dust at fifty microns is invisible under normal light. So the person is doing careful work blind, and then being blamed for the result.



**Herman**

That's the real lesson. Precision work fails when the feedback loop is broken. You can't correct for an error you can't perceive. So the first move in any precision task isn't to try harder. It's to build yourself a way to see.



**Corn**

Side lighting.



**Herman**

Side lighting. In surgery it's the overhead lamp and the loupe. In woodworking it's a raking light across the board so you can see the sanding scratches. In soldering it's magnification. It's the same move every time. Make the defect visible before you try to fix it.



**Corn**

And then the second move is to remove the variable you can't control. That's the alignment frame. You can't will yourself into perfect alignment. You can buy a piece of plastic that does it for you.



**Herman**

Which is the part people resist, because it feels like cheating. It feels like admitting you can't do it.



**Corn**

It's not cheating. It's the same reason a carpenter uses a jig.



**Herman**

Nobody watches a cabinetmaker clamp a jig to a board and thinks "he couldn't do it freehand." They think "he knows what he's doing."



**Corn**

And the third move is to accept that some failures are permanent and plan for them. That's why you buy the two-pack. Not because you expect to fail, but because the cost of a retry has been priced in.



**Herman**

Priced in. That's a good way to put it.



**Corn**

So: see the problem, remove the variable, budget for the retry. That's the whole discipline, and it fits in a fourteen-dollar box.



**Herman**

It does, and I'd note the price is the point. This is not an expensive lesson. The best version of this task costs less than lunch.



**Corn**

Which raises the question of why anyone still gets it wrong.



**Herman**

Because they don't know it's a lesson. They think it's a chore. And chores don't get preparation, they get done.



**Corn**

Chores get done. Yeah.



**Herman**

And speaking of which, I want to go back to the ninety-five percent thing one more time, because there's a version of it that's actually useful and a version that isn't.



**Corn**

Go on.



**Herman**

The useless version is "it's your fault." The useful version is "the defect is in your process, and processes are fixable." Same number, completely different implication.



**Corn**

That's the difference between blaming someone and teaching them.



**Herman**

That's the difference. And it's the same distinction in medicine, actually. You can tell a patient their condition is their own doing, and they'll hear judgment and stop listening. Or you can tell them which specific thing in their routine is producing the outcome, and they'll change it. Same information.



**Corn**

You spent decades doing that.



**Herman**

I spent decades doing that. And the ones who changed were never the ones who got scared. They were the ones who got a specific instruction.



**Corn**

So the specific instruction here is: hot shower, side light, alcohol wipe, dust sticker, alignment frame.



**Herman**

Hot shower, side light, alcohol wipe, dust sticker, alignment frame. And turn the phone off. It's about six instructions and none of them are hard.



**Corn**

Which is the whole argument. None of them are hard, and all of them are invisible if you haven't been told.



**Herman**

I want to put one more thing in, which is the economics of the professional install, because I think it's interesting.



**Corn**

Go on.



**Herman**

Thirty to forty dollars for someone to do it in a store. Fourteen dollars for a frame and two attempts at home. So you're paying roughly twenty dollars for convenience and a clean room.



**Corn**

And what you're really paying for is the environment.



**Herman**

You're really paying for the environment. The person behind the counter doesn't have steadier hands than you. They have a bench, a lamp, and a room that isn't their kitchen.



**Corn**

And if you're going to do it at home, you're building that room out of your bathroom.



**Herman**

You're building that room out of your bathroom. Which is a strange sentence, but it's true.



**Corn**

It's a strange sentence and it's true.



**Herman**

And there's a nice detail here about the cheap kits. The ones that skimp on the alcohol wipe and the dust stickers. The argument is that the consumables are a tell for the whole product. If they won't spend two cents on a dust sticker, what are they doing with the glass?



**Corn**

Which is the same logic as the tape in the paint job. The cheap part is where you learn what they think of you.



**Herman**

That's a good line.



**Corn**

I'll be dining out on it.



**Herman**

You'll be dining out on it for a month.



**Corn**

So what's the actual failure rate on the ninety-five percent claim? Because I want to leave the listener with something honest.



**Herman**

Honest is: the mechanism is certain, the split is soft. Dust under adhesive creates a permanent defect. That part is not in question. Whether it's ninety-five percent of failures or seventy-five is a marketing number from a source with a stake. Treat it as a prior, not a fact.



**Corn**

A prior, not a fact.



**Herman**

And the practical upshot doesn't depend on the exact number anyway. If you fix the process, you fix the outcome, whatever the split is.



**Corn**

Right. And I think there's something worth saying about how many tasks in life look like this. Small, cheap, apparently trivial, and quietly gated on things nobody tells you.



**Herman**

Which is most of them, honestly.



**Corn**

Most of them. The screen protector is just the one everybody's done, so everybody's felt the specific humiliation of it.



**Herman**

And the humiliation is the tell that you were missing information, not ability. That's the reframe.



**Corn**

I want to test that against something. Does the gear argument actually hold up, or does it collapse into "buy more stuff"?



**Herman**

It holds up because the gear is cheap and specific. This isn't "buy a better phone." It's a dust sticker and a plastic jig. The gear argument fails when the gear is expensive and general. It works when the gear is cheap and aimed at one specific failure.



**Corn**

Cheap and aimed.



**Herman**

Fourteen dollars aimed at two specific failure pattern. That's a good trade.



**Corn**

And the bathroom is free. So the total barrier to a flawless install is a hot shower, a lamp, and fourteen dollars.



**Herman**

That's the whole thing.



**Corn**

Which makes you wonder why the manufacturers don't put the dust sticker in a bigger bag with a note on it.



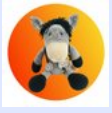
**Herman**

Because they'd rather you bought the frame.



**Corn**

Right. The frame is the upsell.



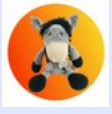
**Herman**

The frame is the upsell, and it's a good one, so I don't begrudge them.



**Corn**

No, it's an honest upsell. It does what it says.



**Herman**

It does what it says, which is rarer than it should be.



**Corn**

Let me put the strongest version of the counterargument, because I think it deserves airtime. If technique beats skill, why do some people still fail with a frame?



**Herman**

Because the frame solves alignment and contact angle, and it doesn't solve dust. You can still install perfectly straight and trap a particle. The frame removes two variables out of four.



**Corn**

So it's not a guarantee.



**Herman**

It's not a guarantee. It takes the success rate from "depends how good you are" to "depends how clean your room is." Which is a much better bet, but it's still a bet.



**Corn**

And the steamy bathroom addresses the room.



**Herman**

The steamy bathroom addresses the room. So frame plus bathroom plus dust sticker is about as close to a guarantee as this task offers.



**Corn**

Which is three things, all cheap.



**Herman**

Three things, all cheap.



**Corn**

And yet.



**Herman**

And yet.



**Corn**

I keep coming back to the tent pole.



**Herman**

The tent pole is the whole image. One particle, and the adhesive can't lie flat, and there's a cone of air, and it's permanent. Everything else in this episode is downstream of that.



**Corn**

A drill-bit-hard sheet of glass, defeated by something you can't see, held up by something you can't see, and the fix is to make it visible.



**Herman**

Make it visible and make the room heavy.



**Corn**

That's the episode. Alright. I think we've got it.



**Herman**

I think we do.



**Hilbert**

The dust stickers are fine. Tape's better.



**Corn**

Tape's better?



**Hilbert**

You can get under the edge with tape. A dust sticker you've got to press flat on the surface, and if the particle's right at the edge of the glass you can't reach it. Tape you fold, you slide it under, you lift. I did that for a summer at a kiosk in a mall. A kiosk. Owner bought the cheap kits, the ones with one alcohol wipe and no stickers, and the wipe dried out if you left the packet open, so by August we were using a bottle of rubbing alcohol and a roll of Scotch tape and that was the whole kit.



**Herman**

How many did you do?



**Hilbert**

Hundreds. Maybe more. You get fast at it. The thing nobody says is the bathroom trick works but it works too well if you're not careful. Had a customer who ran the shower for twenty minutes, and the protector fogged from the inside when it went on. You could see the moisture trapped under it. Had to peel it and start over, and he'd bought the single pack.



**Corn**

So he paid for the lesson.



**Hilbert**

He paid for the lesson. Thirty seconds, by the way. That's what it takes me. No frame. You line the earpiece cutout up with your thumbnail, you lower it, you're done.



**Corn**

Thirty seconds.



**Hilbert**

Thirty seconds. It's in the wrist. I did one once while the phone was still in the box. Just to prove the point.



**Herman**

While it was in the box.



**Hilbert**

Opened the box, didn't take the phone out, laid the protector on, pressed it down, closed the box. Still have the phone somewhere. Anyway, I've got to go. My sister's expecting me.



**Corn**

Alright.



**Herman**

The thirty seconds is not real, though.



**Corn**

No, the thirty seconds is not real.



**Herman**

I've seen him do it. It's closer to ninety.



**Corn**

Ninety is still fast.



**Herman**

Ninety is very fast.



**Corn**

Alright, the one thing. If you take one thing from this, take the reframe. The screen protector isn't a test of your hands. It's a test of whether you built yourself a way to see the problem before you started.



**Herman**

And the way to see it costs about fourteen dollars and a hot shower. Which means the thing standing between most people and a flawless install is information, not ability.



**Corn**

Information, not ability. That's the whole thing. One more open question, and then we're done. Is that ninety-five percent number real? Because if it's not, then the manufacturers have been quietly shifting the blame for a decade, and that's a bigger story than bubbles.



**Herman**

It might be. And it's the kind of thing nobody's going to fund a study on, because there's no money in finding out the glass was fine.



**Corn**

No money in it at all.



**Herman**

None. Thanks as always to Hilbert Flumingtop for producing.



**Corn**

This has been My Weird Prompts. If you enjoyed it, the website is my weird prompts dot com, and there are thousands of episodes there on things you'd never think had this much in them.



**Herman**

We'll be back soon.



**Corn**

See you then.