

# MONEY FOR COUPLES

---

**No more stress. No more fights.  
Just a 10-step plan to create your  
Rich Life together.**

---

Ramit Sethi

WORKMAN PUBLISHING | NEW YORK

Copyright © 2024 by Ramit Sethi

Hachette Book Group supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact [permissions@hbgusa.com](mailto:permissions@hbgusa.com). Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Workman  
Workman Publishing  
Hachette Book Group, Inc.  
1290 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10104  
[workman.com](http://workman.com)

Workman is an imprint of Workman Publishing, a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The Workman name and logo are registered trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Design by Maggie Byrd  
Cover design by Suet Chong  
Cover photo by Menelik Puryear

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Workman books may be purchased in bulk for business, educational, or promotional use. For information, please contact your local bookseller or the Hachette Book Group Special Markets Department at [special.markets@hbgusa.com](mailto:special.markets@hbgusa.com).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sethi, Ramit, author.

Title: Money for couples : no more stress, no more fights, just a 10-step plan to create your rich life together / Ramit Sethi.

Description: New York : Workman Publishing, [2024] | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024034764 (print) | LCCN 2024034765 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781523523689 (paperback) | ISBN 9781523523702 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Couples--Finance, Personal.

Classification: LCC HG179 .S47 2024 (print) | LCC HG179 (ebook) |

DDC 332.024--dc23/eng/20240830

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024034764>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024034765>

First Edition December 2024

Printed in the United States of America on responsibly sourced paper.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**Author's note:** To protect privacy, some names have been changed.

*To every couple  
who wants to live  
a Rich Life together*

## Also by Ramit Sethi

*I Will Teach You to Be Rich*

*I Will Teach You to Be Rich: The Journal*

# Contents

## Introduction

What If Talking about Money Felt Good? ix

## Part 1:

## **10 STEPS TO A RICH LIFE—TOGETHER**

---

### 1 • Your First Positive Conversation about Money 3

.....

***Use these easy word-for-word scripts and keep it light***

How to ensure your conversation goes smoothly • Taboo words you must avoid • What to do if you start fighting

### 2 • Understanding Your Money Psychology 21

.....

***Uncover your invisible scripts, hidden memories, and the four Money Types***

“I will never have a lot of money” and other invisible scripts • Avoider, Optimizer, Worrier, Dreamer • Changing your money beliefs

### 3 • Designing Your Rich Life Vision—Together 47

.....

***How to get on the same page with money (even if you see it differently)***

What makes you irrationally happy? • Your 10-Year Bucket List • What a Rich Life *isn't*

### 4 • Money Dials 67

.....

***How to spend more—a lot more!—on the things you love and less on the things you don't***

Your “Yes” and “Less” Money Dials • When you and your partner want different things with money • Learning how to think bigger

## CONTENTS

### 5 • A Quick Snapshot of Your Financial Life 89

#### ***Discover your net worth in 30 minutes***

The only four numbers you need • When your partner is resistant

### 6 • Changing Your Money Dynamic 99

#### ***How to talk about money without fighting, getting stuck, or giving up***

The Innocent Doe/Enabler and other couples dynamics • What to do if you talk and talk and never make decisions • What a healthy conversation about money looks like

### 7 • Creating Your Conscious Spending Plan 123

#### ***Match your actual numbers to your Rich Life***

You don't need a budget • The joy of guilt-free spending • The CSP Commandments • Setting up your emergency fund

### 8 • Mastering Your Spending 151

#### ***Tackle invisible spending, eliminate overspending, and buy back your time***

When your partner is an overspender • Where almost all of us can cut back • Stop underspending by buying back your time

### 9 • How to Set Up Your Accounts 171

#### ***Build a system so your money flows automatically***

Ramit's Simple Account Setup for Couples • Merging finances when there's a big disparity in income • No secret bank accounts!

### 10 • Living Your Rich Life Together 195

#### ***Establish joyful money routines that actually stick***

The one-hour Monthly Money Meeting • How much money is *enough* money? • Your annual Rich Life Review

## CONTENTS

### Part 2:

## **INSTANT MONEY ANSWERS IF YOU'RE . . .**

---

### Digging Out from Under a Mountain of Debt 231

---

*Make a plan! There's light at the end of the tunnel*

### Getting Married and Considering a Prenup 238

---

*Straight talk about a taboo topic*

### Thinking about a Major Purchase 243

---

*How to run the numbers on vacations, cars, college, and a house*

### Teaching Your Kids about Money 255

---

*Helping your kids build a healthy relationship with money*

### Working with a Financial Advisor 265

---

*The shocking math behind financial advisors—and when it's worth it*

### From the Vault:

#### Ramit's Rules on Everything 272

*Travel, tipping, credit cards, home buying, creating your own Money Rules, and more*

#### Conscious Spending Plan Template 288

#### Acknowledgments 291

#### Index 292





## Introduction

# WHAT IF TALKING ABOUT MONEY FELT GOOD?

Let's pretend that I just knocked on your front door. It's me, anthropologist Ramit Sethi, here with my clipboard to observe you and your partner talking about money for the next month. What will I see in your behavior? What will I notice in your body language? And what will I hear you say?

Tell me if any of these phrases sound familiar:

- *"I can't believe you spent that much!"*
- *"I just want a plan! That's all I'm asking for."*
- *"It feels like we'll never have enough."*

Or perhaps I wouldn't notice anything, because maybe you don't talk about money at all.

In millions of homes around the world, we're having the same fights about money. One partner feels anxious, the other buries their head in the sand to avoid talking about it. One agonizes over the budget, the other spends on whatever they want. We avoid

discussing finances, we tiptoe around difficult conversations, and in the process, we allow money to drive a wedge between us.

I've seen this with people all across the country as I've gone inside their homes to talk about money on my Netflix show, *How to Get Rich*. I've also experienced this in my own relationship: My wife, Cassandra, and I have had really tough conversations about money. We've avoided the topic, we've disagreed, we've even seen a therapist to help us get on the same page about a prenuptial agreement.

At every step of the way, I wondered: *How is everyone else handling money in their relationship?*

That's what you'll learn in this book: a way to truly connect over money, even if you and your partner see it totally differently. Money doesn't have to be a source of stress, guilt, and shame. It can instead be a source of joy, connection, and possibility. I believe this because I've seen it in my own marriage now, after a lot of work—and in the lives of millions of people who've used my material.

To make that transformation, we're going to start by changing the way you *talk* about money, which will change the way you *behave* with money, which will ultimately change the way you *feel* about money.

There are lots of misconceptions about money in relationships. We've all heard the pop-culture idea that “money is the number-one reason for divorce,” but a 2009 study by Lauren M. Papp, E. Mark Cummings, and Marcie C. Goeke-Morey showed that couples don't even broach the subject of money very much. According to actual time diaries kept in relationships, the top sources of fights are kids, chores, and communication. That's because we don't talk about money until it blows up. And when money causes problems, it's bad:

“Spouses rated [money-related] conflicts as much more intense and significant than other conflict topics. . . . Husbands and wives reported that they and their partners expressed more depressive behavior expressions (i.e., physical distress, withdrawal, sadness, and fear) during conflicts about money relative to other topics. Husbands expressed more angry behaviors (i.e., verbal and nonverbal hostility, defensiveness, pursuit, personal insult, physical aggression, threat,

and anger) during conflicts about money compared to other issues . . . and wives reported greater depressive behavior.”

In other words, we start by bottling up our money disagreements. Those disagreements fester into fights and, worse, a long-term lack of connection. I’ll show you how to flip that dynamic on its head and use money to build connection toward a life you *both* want.

Once you and your partner know how to talk about money, everything changes: You’ll create a vision together so you can row in the same direction. You’ll have a simple financial system that you both deeply understand. And you’ll both know why you’re saving,

## I Want to Hear Your Story

Before we go further, I want you to know that I talk about money in a different way from what you’re used to. I won’t be lecturing you about \$5 coffees or telling you to cut everything down to the bone so you can use your money “someday” when you’re 92 years old. I’ll be showing you how to live a Rich Life today and an even richer life tomorrow—together.

Another thing I do differently: I’m going to give you my email address because I want to hear from you—and I read every message. Yes, really! I’m active on social media, but you can email me at [relationship-checkin@iwillteachyoutoberich.com](mailto:relationship-checkin@iwillteachyoutoberich.com), subject: “New book reader.” Tell me . . .

1. What’s an example in the last 30–60 days where you and your partner weren’t on the same page with money? What happened?
2. If you and your partner could get on the same page with money, what would that look and feel like?

While I wish I could reply to every message I get, I can’t anymore—but I try as much as possible.

investing, and even spending. Those persistent arguments will disappear, and you can focus on using money to live your Rich Life together.

What is a Rich Life? It's not necessarily about buying fancy cars and houses (although if you want to, great! I'll show you how). It's an expression of your ideal life in which your money, relationships, and leisure time work beautifully. Everyone's version of a "Rich Life" is different and unique.

A Rich Life can be traveling for two months every year.

A Rich Life can be buying a beautiful cashmere coat.

A Rich Life can be shopping at the grocery store without worrying about prices.

And a Rich Life can be having the time to pick up your children from school every afternoon.

Your Rich Life is uniquely yours. That's what my system is all about—helping you and your partner design your vision together and use your money to make it a reality.

This book gives you a 10-step program for building a shared vision around money, even if you and your partner see money completely differently. You'll learn specific techniques to get your partner involved, including exactly what to say. You'll even learn where things might go off-plan—and how to handle it. And when I come back to your front door with my anthropologist's clipboard a couple of months from now, I'm going to see something amazing: two people working together as a team.

## Why Do We Talk about Money Only When Something Goes Wrong?

---

Most of us discuss money only when something goes awry. That's how we begin to associate "talking about money" with fighting. Think about it: When was the last time you had a conversation about money and enjoyed it?

When I gently ask couples if they have a standing meeting to talk over their finances every month, they stare at me like I'm speaking Klingon: "What? Why would we set up an *agenda* just to talk to each other? That's . . . weird."

*Weird?*

Is it a little weird to have an agenda to talk about money with your partner? Yeah, okay, maybe at first. Do I care? No!

I swear, most Americans would rather stick hot needles in their eyes than feel "awkward" for a single millisecond. Here's what's really going on: We associate talking about money with feeling bad—so why would we ever want to talk about it *more*?

You know what I think is worse than weird? Going 40 years fighting about money, dancing around money, or avoiding talking about money altogether, and never implementing a system to make decisions about money!

Talking about money shouldn't have to be weird. It's a skill you can learn, and when you get good at it, you'll actually start to *like* doing so. I'm asking you to trust that you'll build the skills to become very good at it.

## Real Couples, Real Numbers

---

When my wife and I really started talking about money, right around when we got engaged, I looked online for guidance. The most common advice was "Sit down and have the conversation."

*What conversation?*

Literally, I wanted someone to give me the words. Tell me exactly what to say. Tell me what to avoid. Tell me how to start the conversation, how she's likely to react, and what to do if we start fighting.

Give me the system!!

But there wasn't one. So I created it.

I started with the *Money for Couples* podcast, where I work with real couples on their biggest money disagreements. Some have six figures of debt. Others have millions of dollars and still worry

## 8 Things I've Learned on My Podcast

1. Fifty percent of couples I've spoken to don't know their income. (That's not a typo.) Ninety percent of couples don't know how much debt they're in. One hundred percent of couples with credit card debt have difficulty saying no to their children.
2. People who accumulate millions of dollars often struggle to spend it—even when their spouse is about to divorce them for being cheap.
3. The overwhelming majority of people who come on the podcast—people who describe their financial problems as a 9 or even a 10 out of 10 and go through extensive screening—have not read a single book on personal finance. It's shocking, but it's also human nature.
4. The lower earner is almost always obsessed with the c-word—*contribute*—because they wonder if their nonmonetary contributions are as valuable as money, which is much more easily measured in our culture. (The answer is yes!)
5. A shockingly high number of couples with credit card debt have very specific purchases, such as Apple Watches and iPads with cellular connections.
6. Men call themselves “the provider” and women are taught to keep a secret savings account “just in case.”
7. Many couples argue about shopping at Target for years and years, but the fight is rarely actually about Target. It's about spending over 65 percent of your income on fixed costs, which we'll cover in Chapter 7.
8. When people get into financial trouble, it's almost always about two purchases: their housing and their trucks (excuse me, vehicles).

whether they'll have enough. What you quickly discover is that the way you feel about money is highly uncorrelated with the amount you have in the bank.

The couples I speak to share their income, their debt, where they spend money, and what they worry about. When describing what they learned about money from their parents, they often cry. It's riveting, especially because we've never seen how other couples actually talk about money.

These brave couples apply to be on my podcast because they need help and they know they're not going to be mocked or shamed. They need a new way to connect over money—to change the pattern of fighting into something positive—and a realistic system that simplifies their money so they can work toward a powerful vision together.

That's why I wrote this book. I wish I could speak to every couple who applies to be on my podcast, but with more than 1,000 people on our waiting list, it's impossible. This book will share the most valuable insights for you to build a healthy relationship with money.

Many of those couples from my podcast show up in these pages, sharing intimate stories and real numbers. I find immense comfort in hearing how other people grapple with money, talk about money, and bond over money. I know you will, too.

## Are You the “Money Person” in Your Relationship?

---

In 90 percent of the couples I work with, one partner is “the money person.” I get it—in any relationship, one person might empty the dishwasher, the other takes out the trash. One handles home repairs, the other deals with the laundry. It just makes sense that one person would handle money, right?

Wrong.

Unlike washing the dishes, money cannot be delegated to one person, because money cuts across everything: where you live, what

## MONEY FOR COUPLES

you eat, what you do for fun, even *who you are*. Managing money is less like shopping for groceries and more like parenting. You rarely hear of just one of two partners “doing the parenting thing”—nor should there be one partner “handling the money.”

This is foundational: *Both partners must be involved in the family finances*. When you internalize the importance of both partners having financial skin in the game, you’ll start to understand why so many couples report the same fights:

- *“The minute I walk in the door, he asks how much I spent at Target.”*
- *“She constantly looks at the credit card bill and says I spent too much going out with my friends.”*
- *“He tells me to cut our grocery bills, but he has no idea how much I’ve already cut to the bone.”*

If one person is the “money person,” you’ll never build a true team that works together on creating a Rich Life.

People will go decades arguing over petty expenses, never realizing that the *real* problem is that one person is in charge of money. It would be like thinking you hate cooking for 20 years, only to realize that you have a poorly lit kitchen with bad ventilation and rusty knives. Now that we know what’s actually wrong, we can fix it and move on. What a relief!

Naturally, one person might have more of a knack for money. We see this in all important aspects of life—in parenting, in planning travel, in maintaining family relationships. But both partners have to care about money, because it affects every part of your lives. Both have to talk about finances regularly, build a system together, and evolve it over time. If you don’t create a shared vision and make decisions as a team, it’s easy to fixate on meaningless minutiae like spending on coffee or snacks, or issues I call \$3 questions. We should spend more time asking \$30,000 questions.

When you’re stuck asking \$3 questions, you’re constantly playing defense and arguing about random transactions instead of



## \$3 Questions vs. \$30,000 Questions

Where people try to save money:

- » \$3 coffee

Areas that actually matter:

- » Setting up automatic investments (potential upside: \$250,000)
- » Minimizing investment fees (\$50,000+)
- » Creating a debt-payoff plan (\$50,000)

Ask \$30,000 questions, not \$3 questions.

building a vision and using your money to live it. And even if you “win” by slashing spending money on small or random expenses, then what? Did you actually get anywhere? Do you know what to do with the \$3 you saved? Do you even feel better? The answer is no.

Maybe I’m weird, but I have a personal policy against suffering through thousands of tedious, pointless arguments for the rest of my life. That’s why *both* partners have to understand what the \$30,000 questions are, and then agree to focus on them together.

Here’s how it works for me. In my marriage, I handle our investments because I’m more knowledgeable about investing and my idea of a great Saturday night is reading *The Journal of Asset Management*. But crucially, Cassandra and I still *talk about* investments together: We discuss what percentage of our income we’re investing, where that money is being invested, how much we expect to have in 20 years, and if we should contribute more or less this year. That’s the level at which we’re discussing our money—not how much we spent on coffee last week.

Money is my job, so from the beginning, it would have been easy for me to be the “money guy,” but I insisted we both be involved for three reasons.

1. Eventually I'm going to die, and if I go first, I want Cassandra to feel confident knowing exactly what to do with our money. (There's an epidemic of women who are left unequipped to handle their finances when their partners pass away. They're easy targets for predatory financial sharks. I will never leave my wife in this situation, and I look forward to her laughing and hanging up on the worthless Goldman Sachs wealth advisors who might call her after I kick the bucket. I'll be watching with popcorn from heaven.)
2. I want us to both be good stewards of our money, so we discuss it and nurture it together, like a garden. Good stewardship means we spend it meaningfully, we donate to causes we care about, and we decide what will happen to it once we're gone.

---

## Excuses, Excuses

### **"We don't need a book—we just need a budget."**

Let me put this bluntly: A budget is not why you and your partner can't get on the same page about money. The issue goes much deeper. For the vast majority of people, a budget is a tactical solution to a psychological problem. We find these solutions appealing—even if they don't work!—because in our culture, we're taught that numbers are important and feelings are not. A budget won't save you, but learning how to connect over money just might.

### **"My partner will never do this with me."**

Maybe that's the case. So what are your options? To give up? To do things the way you've always done them? If that hasn't worked, let's try another approach: mine. As former Netscape CEO Jim Barksdale said, "If we have data, let's look at data. If all we have are opinions, let's go with mine." Even if you read this book completely on your own, you can make enough progress to get 85 percent of the way to where you want to be.

## WHAT IF TALKING ABOUT MONEY FELT GOOD?

3. Finally, it's a lot more fun to manage money together! When we talk about money, we get to plan our dream vacations together, think about where we want to spend more (or less) next year, and create a beautiful culture of money in our household.

It would have been a lot simpler in the short term for me to just handle the finances myself. But the payoff from building a shared understanding of money is so much greater than an “easy” approach. Every couple has money challenges, Cassandra and me included, and talking about money regularly and proactively has helped us deal with ours. When we got married, we had very different perspectives on money. As business owners, we have irregular income and expenses. But because we have consistent money conversations, we

---

### **“Our problems go a lot deeper than money.”**

You're right! But let's start with money, because with every day that goes by, you're losing a lot by not investing money together.

### **“Maybe this would work, if only . . .**

- . . . we earned more.”
- . . . we didn't live in such a high-cost-of-living area.”
- . . . my partner wasn't so irresponsible.”
- . . . the economy wasn't so terrible.”
- . . . and so on (fill in the blank).

Yeah, probably. Life would be a lot easier for me if I were 6'3" with an Australian accent, but here we are. We play the hand we're dealt. You can simultaneously acknowledge the need for systemic change *and* focus on what you can control—and this book is about taking control of your money together.

### **“Talking about money is stressful and depressing.”**

That's why I'm here! It doesn't have to be, and it shouldn't be. My system is going to help change all that for you and your partner.

have a shared language, and we know how to use it, in good times and bad. We're true partners in our Rich Life, and this is what I want for you and your partner, too.

## A New Way to Look at Money

---

This book will help you shift away from associating money with dread, fear, and resentment. Instead, you'll learn what to say and do to connect money with a sense of competence, joy, opportunity, purpose, and generosity. And yes—you and your partner can do this together, even if you don't see money exactly the same way.

Will it always be easy? No, of course not. Is your partner going to be as enthusiastic as you are? Maybe not. But I've worked with couples in all situations, and whether a couple has \$800,000 in debt or millions of dollars, they need the same things: better communication and a system that sticks. I have a system that's worked for thousands of couples, and it will work for you.

In the following pages . . .

- ***You'll learn exactly what to say when talking about money***, even if your partner resists these sorts of conversations.
- ***You'll get the steps to create a joint vision of your Rich Life***—one that fits you as an individual and as a couple.
- ***You'll learn how your past affects the way you feel about money***, and how to change your story to one that feels positive and future oriented.
- ***You'll learn how to think beyond the month with your finances***. For many of us, managing our money feels like driving in the fog and being able to see only 50 feet ahead. You'll build a real vision months ahead—even years ahead. What a relief.
- ***You'll discover how to work smoothly as a team***, making decisions together through the lens of your Rich Life.

## WHAT IF TALKING ABOUT MONEY FELT GOOD?

- ***You'll know how to advocate for yourself—without fighting***—when it comes to spending, saving, investing, and the way you both handle money.
- ***You'll have an airtight money system*** that needs only an hour a month of maintenance, including the exact accounts and a real plan.
- ***You'll start to finally feel good about money***. Best of all, this is a feeling you'll share with your partner, because you did it together.

By opening this book, you've sent a signal to yourself—that money's important to you, that you're not going to apologize for caring about your finances, and that there's room for you and your partner to become closer via your money. You've also embraced the idea of getting some help. I'm going to give you everything I give the couples I work with—word-for-word scripts, tactics, probing questions, psychology examples, and more. At times I'm also going to push you, just like I push them.

I promise that as soon as you and your partner have one good money conversation, your whole outlook will change. You'll realize this is an entirely new approach to money. And by the end of this book, when you've built trust with your partner, when you've had several conversations where you both smile and feel *good* talking about money, you'll see that money is something you can take control of—together.

Now let's get started.



PART 1

.....

# 10 Steps to a Rich Life— Together





# YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

---

*Use these easy word-for-word  
scripts and keep it light*

---

“Can you think of a time in the last 30 days when the two of you weren’t on the same page with money?”

This is the question I ask couples when they come on my podcast. It seems innocent enough, a softball, something to help guests open up to me with a funny story and maybe a laugh. But the question is no accident. It’s the highly calculated result of testing over two dozen different questions to find this specific one.

I’ve discovered that when most of us talk about the role of money in our relationships, we suddenly get vague and generic:

- “I’m a saver. They’re a spender.”
- “I just wish they would make a plan.”
- “We just can’t seem to agree about money.”

Those might be technically true, but they don't get to the heart of what's really going on. For that, we need to get into real specifics with real details. We need to get more real, not more vague!

So, when I asked a recent couple about a time they disagreed about money in the last month, they both took a deep breath and proceeded to talk for the next 12 minutes. They assigned blame, they preemptively defended their own behavior, and they revealed how anxious money made them.

I loved it. But finally, I had to interrupt.

I asked, "Have either of you ever felt good about money?"

"No," they both said.

What a breathtaking moment. When I cut in, they were busy arguing over the price of a \$15 lunch, which was a tiny symptom of what was actually going on in their relationship: *They both feel bad about money*. All their disagreements stem from that. But if I'd simply asked them, "What's the problem with money in your relationship?" they would have said, "We're just not on the same page."

Details matter. The words you choose are like an X-ray of how you feel about money. We avoid money, we fight about money, we worry about money, but the truth is revealed in the everyday words we use.

That's why we're going to focus on *how* we talk. I want you to see what it's like to have a great conversation about money, where you're both smiling and you both feel connected.

## Redefining "The Money Conversation"

---

Let's start by understanding how most of us think about "The Money Conversation."

Notice that small but telling word: *the*. We believe that we need to have "the" conversation about money to get on the same page—as if a single chat is going to change everything in our lives! Would we have merely one conversation about parenting? Or taking care of our

elderly parents? Of course not. We understand that important topics deserve our ongoing attention.

So reframe your money conversations:

*“We get the privilege of having lots of conversations about how we want to use money to create our Rich Lives. And we get to talk about it together for the rest of our lives.”*

What a relief! You don’t have to have the perfect conversation. You get many opportunities to talk about money. You’re not in a rush, and nobody expects you to magically know what to say the first time around. You’re bringing together two different ways of seeing money, two different family histories, two different visions of what your life will look like.

Talking about money is a skill, and you’re about to start building that skill together. Like the first time you rode without training wheels, it’s likely you’ll “fall off the bike” at times. Acknowledge that it’s not easy, own it, even have fun with it. You can say this: “Look, I’m nervous about this. Sometimes I might say the wrong thing. But I’m excited about getting better at this with you.” Lead with your vulnerabilities, which make it easier for your partner to open up about theirs.

Before you sit down, I recommend you outline the conversation—don’t wing it. If you had an important upcoming meeting at work, I bet you wouldn’t just spitball it. Eighty percent of the work is done before you ever set foot in the room, so I always visualize my important conversations in advance, anticipating where things might go wrong and planning for it. Consider that if you were an Olympic bobsledder, you’d visualize every curve before your big race. Similarly, take this conversation seriously—it may not be “the” talk, but it does help set the foundation for the rest of your financial lives.

Here’s how to create a great outline: First, get clear on what you want out of the conversation by taking a couple of minutes and jotting down everything on your mind, which might look a little like the following list.

## MONEY FOR COUPLES

- What is this \$16.39 charge at the gas station last week?
- Did you fill out the forms for your health insurance?
- Will we have enough to retire?
- What is this credit card that I found stuffed in a drawer?
- How can I get you to talk about money with me?
- The kids' school has another field trip, and I don't know where the money should come from.
- What's a Roth IRA?

Now zoom out: Save all those questions you wrote down—you'll get to them eventually. Your first money conversation is not about *most* of those things. In fact, if you jump straight into asking about a

---

## Reframing the Language We Use Around Money

The words we use to talk about money are extremely revealing. For example, you could say, “We *have* to talk about money today [sigh],” or you could say, “We *get* to talk about money today [high five].” Imagine the impact of speaking about money positively over decades together. How would that shape your perception?

You can change the way you look at money from dread to opportunity, and quickly. It starts by intentionally choosing different language—even if the conversation is only inside your head. For example . . .

***Instead of:*** “We can’t afford it.”

***Use this:*** “We can’t afford it yet, but we’re building a plan to save for it.”

***Instead of:*** “I would never pay for this.”

***Use this:*** “In the past, I would never have paid for this, but I’m starting to understand why some people would.”

## YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

charge on last week's credit card bill, you'll be stuck asking \$3 questions forever.

Take that list, look at your questions, and circle the one thing that matters more than all the other ones combined. In the list above, there is only one real topic to tackle for your first money conversation: "How can I get you to talk about money with me?" Solve that, and the rest follow.

Here are examples of "good" questions for this first meeting:

- What would it look like if we both felt good about money? How often would we talk about it? What would we do more of? Less of?
  - What's one thing I can do to help you feel more comfortable talking about money? (And vice versa.)
  - What kind of financial values do we want to teach our kids?
- 

***Instead of:*** "That's for rich people, not for people like us."

***Use this:*** "I didn't grow up doing that, but if we want to, we can plan for it." (Unless it's something outrageously expensive like buying a private jet, in which case try this: "That's a nice plane, but I'd rather take a family vacation together.")

***Instead of:*** "Must be nice to spend that much. We can barely afford . . ."

***Use this:*** "We choose what's important for our Rich Life, and other people choose what's important for them."

The language we use becomes our identity. What kind of language have you been using?

I used to jokingly call myself a "skinny Indian guy"—it became a self-fulfilling prophecy and something I believed was extremely hard to change. In reality, I just hadn't yet learned the skills of lifting weights and eating right. Looking back, I wish I had never said that about myself.

Your language shapes your reality. Choose your words carefully!

Now that you've carefully considered what you hope to talk about, you can make a clean, simple outline like this:

### Our First Amazing Money Meeting

- Why this meeting is going to be awesome
- How I feel about money (How about you?)
- How I want to feel about money (How do you want to feel about it?)
- Next steps (Let's talk more next week.)

Let's break down each part of this outline for your chat—excuse me, your “First Amazing Money Meeting.”

## THE CONVERSATION ITSELF (15–20 MINUTES)

***Why this meeting is going to be awesome.*** Tell your partner why you're so excited to talk about money. Mention that you're reading this book and how it's going to feel great to build something together. Make sure your energy is high.

“I've been reading this book on couples and money, and it's giving me so many ideas for how we can talk about money together. The author writes about how all these couples manage their finances and how we can save money and spend money on the stuff we love.”

***How I feel about money.*** Most of us never actually describe our own feelings about money. Think of it: When was the last time you said, “I feel scared” or “I feel worried”? When was the last time your partner shared their feelings? I recommend you lead with vulnerability here by sharing first, then ask your partner how they feel about money—and *listen*. Ask clarifying questions, even if the responses aren't what you're expecting. Remember, this is an opportunity to

## YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

describe your feelings, not to make accusations. (Our therapist gave us the Wheel of Emotions, which was very helpful. Search for it online to use it!)

“I feel confused by our money. Like, I just don’t understand that spreadsheet that we use. I wish I did, but it doesn’t make sense for the way I think.”

“I feel worried. I know you’ve said everything is going to be okay, but I get anxious when I look in our checking account and it’s running low.”

“Sometimes I feel resentful about money because I manage our monthly bills and our grocery shopping and I would really love some help. I think I feel alone.”

***How I want to feel about money.*** Paint a powerful vision that goes beyond “not worrying” about money. Avoid focusing on what you don’t want to feel like and describe what emotions you *do* want to feel.

“I want to feel knowledgeable about money. I want to feel confident. I want to feel like I have a partner, like you have my back and I have yours.”

“I want to feel good about money so we can make a plan for the things we’d like to do with our money. I know we’ve talked about taking a trip to Iceland, about having a weekly date night . . . That’s what I want us to both feel good about.”

“What about you?”

***Next steps.*** Keep it short! Better to have a brief, positive conversation than a long, exhausting, negative one. My philosophy: Declare victory and go home! You have lots of time to talk about money together. For the first meeting, your goal should be to feel good—and then end on a high note.

“This makes me so happy. I think we should wrap it up today, but I just want to tell you how much I love you and how good it feels to be able to talk about this. Can we talk more next week? I would love to start making a plan with our money. Maybe Saturday afternoon?”

Adapt the scripts above for your own situation. As you can see, the first conversation is short, honest, and upbeat. And bear in mind: Nobody taught us this. Most of us get more guidance on sex than talking about money! So give yourselves some room to laugh if things feel a little uncomfortable.

### Tips to make your first money conversation go smoothly

- Reframe the meeting for yourself. What if this were fun? What if it were easy? What would your body language communicate? What would your face convey? Then do that.
- Show your partner some grace. You’ve been reading this book and thinking about the money talk. Your partner most likely has not. Your approach, no matter how gentle, will catch them off guard. Be sensitive.
- Expect to hear some phrases that may trigger you (“I’m just not good with money”). When I hear people talk about money, they frequently use certain phrases on autopilot. Chances are, they won’t even remember saying them tomorrow. Understand that people behave in peculiar ways when they feel stressed or surprised. Listen, then ask another way. If you get stuck, move on.
- When you talk about how you want to feel about money, focus on what you *do* want—not what you *don’t* want (“I don’t want to feel worried” becomes “I want to feel confident”). This is important because it’s easy to get mired in the negatives, but creating a vision is about what you *do* want.



## YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

- Keep in mind that your job is not to answer every question your partner throws at you, or to “check off” every item on the agenda. Stay focused on your North Star: to have a money conversation where you both feel good.
- At the end, give your partner a hug and say, “I love you.” Then don’t talk about money for the rest of the day!

### What *not* to do

- The same thing you’ve always done. Same topics, same phrases, same tone, same location, same, same, same. If you want to make a change, then change.
- Bring up the subject in bed, right when one of you finishes work, or when you’re distracted, hungry, or tired.
- Treat the conversation as an obligation. (*Sigh*. “Okay, I know you don’t like talking about money, but . . .”) Reframe: “Talking about money is a gift! We get to do this together! And this will be a marathon, not a sprint, so let’s have fun along the way.”

## Where and When to Meet

Think about where you’ll have your conversation and when you’re going to talk. Ideally it’ll be in the morning in a calm place with no distractions such as children running around. (Easy for me to say, I know—but this is important. Find a way.) Try to set aside a block of quiet time where you’re both present and engaged. If it needs to happen a few days in the future, that’s fine.

## MONEY FOR COUPLES

- Ask a leading question to which you really know the answer—that is, set a verbal trap. (“What do you think we should do to cut our spending? Okay, and what about that hobby of yours? I keep telling you, you need to stop . . .”)
- Feel the need to solve every problem in one conversation. You have plenty of time.

## GOOD OPENING LINES

- If you know your partner will be excited to talk about money: *“I want to try something new. I want to use the exercises in this book I’m reading so we can start to plan our Rich Lives together.”*

---

## Talking about Money When You’re Dating

If you’re dating to find a long-term partner, there’s nothing wrong with wanting to know how your date thinks about money. If you end up together, your finances will be a core foundation of your life, affecting where you live, how you spend your leisure time, what opportunities your children have—just about everything. Of course, you don’t want to be a weirdo, pulling out a 67-page folder of financial questions on the second date. When the time is right, ask genuine questions and listen closely: People reveal almost everything.

Here are some questions you could pose.

### **“What did your family do for fun when you were growing up?”**

Your date might say they went skiing in Aspen or, if they were like my family, they went to the public library and \$1 movie theater. Either way, this tells you a lot about their upbringing and their likely views on money.

## YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

- If you have a contentious history around money: *“I’m wondering, would you be open to talking about money? I want us both to be able to feel good about it. How about Wednesday night?”*
- If you’re both new to talking about money: *“I was feeling confused about money, so I bought this book and I want to get your input. Can I ask you a few questions?”*

It’s okay if you get an odd reaction when you say you want to have a money talk. Most people are caught off guard when money comes up, especially because they’ve been conditioned by a lifetime of negative money conversations, so their reactions are often abrupt or even angry. They instinctively feel like they’re going to get in

---

**“How much should we tip?”** Sometimes you can ask. Other times you can simply observe what they do. Does your date tip poorly? Do they offer to split costs? Are they generous, proactive, and considerate? These qualities show up early.

**“How do you picture your future?”** If you’ve developed a crystal-clear vision of your life, you might want to simply share it and gauge their reaction. In the West, this can seem shockingly forward and is usually best held until later in the dating process, but in other cultures, this is discussed on day one. For example, my parents got married seven days after they met, so they had to be immediately direct with what they were looking for.

**“Can we talk about how to pay for this trip we’re taking next month?”** A first trip is a perfect opportunity to talk about money. It’s relatively low stakes, both of you want to impress each other with how easygoing you are, and you likely have different views on who should pay and what’s worth it. Great! Just one suggestion: Come with an idea of what *you* want. Otherwise, it’s too easy to ask your partner what they want and let them dictate the terms of the discussion.

trouble. Imagine how you would have reacted if previously—before you began your journey of financial self-improvement—someone had told you they wanted to “talk about money.” You probably wouldn’t have wanted to hear it, either!

Once you understand that your partner may be hesitant or resist this conversation, you’ll be able to give them space to say whatever comes into their mind, then gently redirect them to your main goal.

Here are some examples:

**Partner:** “Uhh . . . okay.” (The subtext: “This is weird.”)

**You:** “Okay, awesome. I’m reading this book, and I want to get your thoughts on how we can . . .”

**Partner:** *Sigh.* “Another one of these?”

**You:** *Smile.* “I know we haven’t talked about money in a positive way before, and I want to change that so we can both feel good about it.”

**Partner:** “Haven’t we already tried this?”

**You:** “Yeah, we have. I think I approached it the wrong way. I want us both to feel good when we talk about money. Would you be open to trying again?”

**Partner:** “Fine, I’ll do whatever you want” (while mentally checking out).

**You:** “Okay, great—thanks. Is this a good time or should we do it later this week?”

**Partner:** “Why do you always need to talk about money?!”

**You:** “I love you. It’s really important to me that we find a way to talk about this together. Would you be willing to trust me and try this together?”

## TABOO WORDS YOU MUST AVOID

When it comes to money, certain words and phrases instantly cause people to become defensive. Many of us fall into the trap of saying at least one of them, which almost always derails the conversation. By

## YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

not bringing up any of the following, you'll give yourself a massive advantage at having a successful first money conversation.

- **“Budget.”** Everyone hates budgets, including me. Just don't say it.
- **“Credit card bill.”** If you have credit card debt and you bring this up in the first conversation, it will suck any positive energy right out of the room. You have time to talk about it later.
- **“We need to get serious.”** If you were going to try playing pickleball for the first time and the coach said, “You really need to get serious,” how would you feel? Your goal is fun and connectedness, not lecturing.
- **“You always . . .”** and **“You never.”** If someone says you “always” do something bad, the natural reaction is to argue back, so using this phrase will trap you. Quick trick: If you get stuck, focus on the “we,” not the “you.”
- **“I just want to . . .”** This use of *just* is interesting because it's so common and so casual—but the problem is that *just* minimizes your goal. Resist that urge to shrink the importance of money. Your vision is to build a Rich Life, not to “just” stop fighting or “just” agree on how much to spend at Target. Although it might seem easier to focus on a small topic, people tend to react better to a larger vision: *I don't want to stop overspending at the grocery store; I want to live a Rich Life.* This conversation is the beginning of a new way of treating money with the respect it deserves.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU START FIGHTING

It's going to happen. At some point, you and your partner will argue about money. That's normal! My wife and I still disagree about money. The point is to anticipate and plan for it, so when it happens, you know exactly what to do. Here's a list of handy phrases you can use when you have a disagreement.

## That First Money Conversation When You're Moving in Together

Moving in is another perfect time to talk about money, because you're both making a change that will affect your finances in a big way. Begin the conversation confidently: Money is a normal topic to discuss when you're cohabitating. Treat it accordingly and avoid apologizing for bringing up the subject ("Ugh . . . um . . . I guess we should talk about splitting the rent?"). The goal is to simply open the topic of money and gently shift your identity to a couple that talks about it—as all people in healthy relationships do.

### **Start with one of these:**

"I've been thinking about finances. Can we talk about it? I'd love for us to get on the same page about money."

"Honestly, I'm not super comfortable talking about money. But I think this is a great chance for us to do it."

"It's important to me that we talk about money together. I want to start the conversation so this becomes something that's normal for us."

Be open and listen as much as you talk. Don't start with a hidden agenda—like a plan to get your partner to admit they spend too much on video games. And remember, you're not going to cover everything in one conversation.

### **Within three conversations, you want to determine . . .**

- » the mechanics of how you're going to handle shared costs (rent, utilities, groceries, eating out).
- » your financial numbers (income, debt, how you both choose to spend your discretionary money).
- » whether there are any red flags you want to address immediately or over time.
- » when to reconvene and talk about money again.

## YOUR FIRST POSITIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

- ***“Can we take a break?”*** It’s okay to regroup for a minute, go get a glass of water, and even peek at your notes to get back on track.
- ***“Can you help me understand what you mean? I don’t think I’m getting it—and I really want to.”*** Vulnerability is connective. Use it more often!
- ***“I’m feeling overwhelmed right now. Can we pick this back up tomorrow?”*** If the conversation is veering off in a way you can’t manage, it’s time for a longer pause. Express empathy and wrap things up for now. It’s not your job to meet every challenge your partner raises. Your job is to begin working toward positive communication around money. Sometimes that requires ending the conversation early.

Conflict is inevitable, but you can certainly disagree about money without fighting. On my Netflix show, I spoke to a young couple, Christian and Millie. Christian revealed that he’d lost \$80,000 on a single investment. I can understand being upset! But to their credit, they didn’t fight—even when they disagreed, they talked through their issues and reminded each other that they were a team.

## Looking Ahead to the Next Conversation

---

Let’s assume you had a short, positive first conversation.

In Chapter 3, you’re going to begin designing your Rich Life vision together. Between now and then, you can continue building your connection around money. When you schedule your next meeting, ask your partner to add a topic to the agenda. This signals that discussing money is a team activity—not just you leading and them following—and it gives them time to contribute so they’re part of the process.

When you’re thinking about the agenda, play with big and small topics. The big ones are lifestyle questions and Rich Life dreams. The

small topics are questions like how to handle a specific issue, such as who will take the car in for service or whether to switch banks for your checking account.

In advance of the meeting, jot down something you've noticed and appreciated about your partner since the first meeting. This doesn't have to be related to money. Here are a few examples my wife and I recently shared with each other:

- “Thanks for taking the lead in planning Christmas with our parents. It was really cool to see everyone playing those games together. I never would have thought of those activities, so I really love seeing you create these memories with all of us.”
- “When I had that [medical issue] last month, it meant a lot that you took a day off work and drove me there and took care of me. I really felt loved, so thank you.”
- “I’ve noticed you’ve been asking if I need anything, and how I’m doing, more often. It makes me feel cared for.”

### Topics for Future Money Conversations

- » How much income and debt you both have (if you don't already know)
- » Setting up a will, if you don't already have one (you should)
- » Who should be the guardians for your kids if you become incapacitated or die (fun topics for a Saturday night!)
- » What role you'd like to play in helping family members, including taking care of elderly parents
- » What kind of lifestyle do you envision in 1 year? 5 years? 10 years?



Think up a few, then choose one. This will be the first thing you say at meeting #2; you're going to build a new habit of starting off money conversations with a compliment, which totally changes the dynamic. Later, when you implement Monthly Money Meetings in Chapter 10, you'll use this practice, and soon it will become second nature.

## Chapter 1 Checklist

- ☐ Prep for your first money conversation. What is the key question you want to address? How can you start the conversation in a way that will make your partner feel safe and engaged? How will you react if it doesn't go the way you planned? Make a simple agenda and share it.
- ☐ Have your first money conversation. Keep it short, positive, and future focused! Remember, you don't have to cover everything in one talk.
- ☐ Schedule your second conversation. Keep the momentum going. Ask your partner to add at least one item to this meeting's agenda, and lead with something you appreciate about them in your next money conversation.