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**Tami:** [00:00:11] Honestly, I'm terrible when we get into fights like that, because I tend to just almost like black out, like I can't even tell you details of any of the argument.

**Mike:** [00:00:20] Honestly, like I felt a little bit taken advantage of.

**Tami:** [00:00:24] I just think that it's really important to us to not recreate some of what we experienced as children. We knew like going into being parents that we were going to have to just be better. It's easier said than done.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:00:47] I'd like to introduce you to Tami and Mike. They're Midwestern couple, they met 17 years ago, and they have a son named Rowan, who's two years old. And they make \$135,000. But believe it or not, the reason they came to talk to me was a trip to Target. Tami had taken a trip to Target, she bought some stuff, and when she came home, Mike's first question was, "How much did you spend?" And this led to a blowout fight.

Well, as you listen to the conversation today, I want you to pay close attention to the way they talk to each other, the way they joke with each other. It's sarcastic, but it goes a lot further than that. And as I try to unpeel what's really going on here, you're going to hear a lot of surprises, particularly towards the end of the episode. My name is Ramit Sethi, and this is the I Will Teach You To Be Rich podcast. Here we go.

Tami, can you tell me what happened recently when you went to Target?

**Tami:** [00:01:58] It was probably just to pick up a couple of things. We're in the pandemic, and we're following the CDC guidelines really, really strictly. So, going to the store is a luxury now in a way that it never was before. I found like the household things that we need, like cleaning supplies and I got snacks. And all in all, it ended up being like, I don't know, probably around like \$250. And so, when I got home, he asked how much I spent.

And so, when I told him how much I spent, he got really upset, because it is a decent

chunk of money for me to just randomly spend. Like anytime we spend more than, I would say, like 50-ish dollars, we usually check in with each other, like, "Hey, is it cool if I spend this much money?" So, for me to just go and drop like \$250 dollars at Target was kind of a big deal.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:02:57] Okay. Wait, wait, wait. I just got to stop and cut in here. Listen, I grew up in suburbia. I know everything there is to know about Target. You walk in there, I know where the Hot Tamales are. I know where the detergent is. I know that Target now carries a copy of my book, *I Will Teach You To Be Rich*. I even know that when I bought a bike my senior year of high school to go to college, the cashier looked up at me and he actually made fun of me, he goes, oh, would you like some pom-poms with that, too?

That Huffy bike may have been a girl's bike, I'll never know. But what I do not understand is how obsessed so many of you are with Target. Every single time I mention Target, I get 200 tweets like, "LOL. Is it possible to even walk out of Target without spending 100 bucks? My wife gets lost in there. Better say bye for an hour." Like is this the new Disneyland, people going shopping at Target?

And then, I think to myself, wait a second, my wife loves Target. And every time we go in there, she pulls out the red cart, and then disappears. I'm like, "What the hell is going on right now? How did Target get so popular?" Whatever they did, I think it was that Michael Graves teapot that they came out with in 2000. Good job, because all people talk about is how much they love Target. Okay.

Back to this couple. Did you notice that she casually mentioned that when she got home, he asked how much she spent? Does anyone else find that curious? I do. See, sometimes, one of the benefits of speaking to couples is that I get to gently point out that what they think is normal actually isn't that common. For example, if you earn \$135,000, should your first question really be, how much did you spend? Listen carefully to that clue. You're going to hear a lot more of it.

**Tami:** [00:04:56] We kind of just got in a huge fight, and honestly, I'm terrible when we get into fights like that, because I tend to just almost like black out, like I can't even tell you details of any of the argument. I just remember that I was getting more and more

upset, and Mike basically had said something along the lines of the fact that like he makes more money than me, so it's not fair for me to go and spend more money when—that amount of money, at least, that he sacrificed to stay at his job and to make the amount of money that he does.

So, like if anybody's going to be spending that money, basically, it should be him. So, I got super upset, and then I left. Like I just said, "I'm leaving", and I said other things, and then I just got in the car, and I drove off, and I went and returned a bunch of the stuff to Target. I just remember just feeling like small and like less than, I guess, which kind of spills into other areas of like our marriage, and our partnership, and division of like responsibilities. And so, I felt even worse after that.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:06:15] Mike, what was your experience with that Target trip?

**Mike:** [00:06:19] When she got back from Target, I think my expectation was like, "Hey, you took as much time as you wanted to, you kind of got away, you probably bought a few things, but like nothing crazy. You maybe pick some stuff up we needed and something small for yourself." And so, I initially, honestly didn't know how much she spent. I kind of asked and we didn't have much of a conversation about it.

So, it wasn't until like a little bit later when I got a sense that she had actually bought more stuff. At that point, I had felt frustrated just because I kind of felt like, okay, I already was like, "Hey, go take your time, no rush. I'll take over parenting duties, and do whatever, spend some money." I think there was a text message somewhere in there, too, where I was like, "Hey, like don't worry about it. If you need to spend 50 bucks, spend 50 bucks, whatever."

Like in my mind, probably trying to set like a, "Hey, I'll be cool if you spend this much without us really discussing it." And so, honestly, like I felt a little bit taken advantage of and I initially didn't immediately voice my kind of displeasure or whatever. I kind of just like sat on it, but I think it was really obvious that I was upset. And so, I think she picked up on that and I was frustrated about her spending the money.

I think what I'll do sometimes when we do have money disagreements, whether it's planned or not, is that I'll kind of justify when I want to spend money, because I do feel

like, "Hey, I make more money." We make kind of a group decision that like, "Hey, you're going to take a different position, so that you'll have a better work-life balance", and that's going to mean we have to make some cuts. And so, I think that, to her, maybe meant we both make cuts together.

To me, that meant like, you make cuts, but I'll get a little more flexibility, because I make like \$30,000 more or whatever, which is not a fair assumption, but I try to say that to her in that moment. And fairly, she only heard me saying like, "I make more money than you. It's okay for me to go spend money, not you." And so, I tried to backpedal out of it, I was like, "No, no, no, I'm not saying I feel that way. I'm saying like that was like the gut reaction that I got. It was shitty that I said that. It's not right, but it is how I felt. I just want to be honest with you."

And I think at that point, she was like shut down and out the door, was just this thing of like, "I have a harder, more stressful job, I make more money, and we don't have an even split of certain things, and I feel like you sometimes aren't conscious of that with our finances". I guess like I'm a fairly anxious person, like I want kind of control of a lot of things.

And I think that, ultimately, like if I tick this box, it's like, okay, well, that's handled, we don't have to worry about Tami going and spending money that I had some sort of like majestic plan for in the future. Even if I didn't have a plan for it, it's just like the fact that like she walks out to the door, and I don't know where she and the money are going. Like it's stressful to me.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:09:06] But isn't she your wife?

**Mike:** [00:09:07] Yeah. I mean, right, if there's anybody I can trust, that should be my wife.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:09:11] Do you trust her?

**Mike:** [00:09:13] Yeah, I do. I mean, literally, with like more important things than money. No, I mean, I do like-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:09:19] Hold on a second. You trust her. I believe you that you trust her, but just 10 seconds ago, you said, there she goes out the door with \$250. Like that's a bit of an odd way to describe your wife, wouldn't you say?

**Mike:** [00:09:35] It is.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:09:36] It's not even \$25,000, by the way. It's 250, what's she going to do? Oh, 250 bucks, she filled up the car three times with gas. What are we going to do with 250 bucks?

**Mike:** [00:09:48] Right.

**Tami:** [00:09:50] After he like calms down a little bit from his like anxiety and like he can take a step back, he realizes that like, yeah, in the scheme of things, this isn't a big deal.

**Mike:** [00:10:02] Right.

**Tami:** [00:10:03] But in that moment, it's those moments that add up kind of a thing, because then I get more like nervous and anxious about like spending money or feeling like there's a part of me that feels like I have to hide it, but also, like I have to tell him about it. Like if it's more than just like gas station snacks, or running to the party store or something, it ends up becoming, I think, a bigger thing in the long run, because those small types of disagreements add up to having lingering consequences.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:10:44] You know what I find interesting? I find it interesting that, Tami, you went to the store with a plan to buy a couple of things and ended up buying \$250 worth of stuff, far more than you had planned. I find it interesting that you justified it to yourself by saying, well, these were gifts for our niece, and nephew, and this, and that, and you sort of papered over the fact that you knew you spent more than either of you expected. In fact, you hid that when you came home, you were not forthcoming. Okay. I find that interesting. I find it equally interesting, Mike, that the first question you asked her was, what was that question when she came home?

**Mike:** [00:11:29] I'm pretty sure I asked her how much she spent.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:11:31] Yeah. Is that a common question, Mike, that you ask her?

**Mike:** [00:11:36] I mean, probably, yeah, I would say so. It depends on like the circumstance, but I would say definitely like if she's going to certain places, where there's a certain expectation on my end that I know she's going to want to buy stuff, I mean, I think also before she goes somewhere, I'm like, "Hey." So, I try to be like, "Spend this much".

**Tami:** [00:11:52] I mean, I went out just a couple of weeks ago with my best friend to run to TJ Maxx or something, and what did you say? You made a joke, it was joking, but he still made a comment to Courtney, what did you say? You said something like-

**Mike:** [00:12:09] I think something about make sure she doesn't spend too much or something.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:12:13] Okay. Hold it right there.

**Tami:** [00:12:14] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:12:15] Mike, how do you think that that joke is perceived?

**Mike:** [00:12:19] I think it's like both disempowering, and like you don't trust me, and like I'm going to just go do something simple and you think I'm going to make dumb decisions.

**Tami:** [00:12:28] Yeah. And then, we came back, and as a joke, this is probably just as bad, but like I brought in mine and Courtney's bags together, and was like, "I only spent a little bit of money", and he was just like, "Are you kidding me?", when he saw like the amount of bags that I had.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:12:49] So, Tami, you're playing into it as well?

**Tami:** [00:12:52] Well, yeah, because I was like, alright, well, if you're going to make this joke, I'll make this joke. And then, he was like, "How much did you really spend?"

And I was still like, "Well, I only spent \$65", but then I was like, "Oh, God, I still spent \$65."

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:04] Can I ask you a question?

**Tami:** [00:13:06] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:07] The two of you making these jokes to each other over a trip out with your friend to TJ Maxx, what do both of you get out of it?

**Tami:** [00:13:16] I think probably just, I don't know, like satisfaction kind of a thing.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:23] Of? You're getting satisfaction out of you being what?

**Tami:** [00:13:27] Better.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:28] Better than who?

**Tami:** [00:13:30] Mike.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:31] Yeah. Mike, what are you getting out of these jokes? What are you getting out of the joke that you pull Courtney aside, and say, "Keep your eye on Tami, make sure she doesn't spend all this money"?

**Mike:** [00:13:39] My most honest answer that I think is that I'm really trying to, without actually saying it to her, be like, "Don't go spend money". I think to me, it's mostly a control thing.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:52] Do you really need to check up on how much she's spending at TJ Maxx? This is not Louis Vuitton.

**Mike:** [00:13:52] I know, right.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:13:52] What are you going to get at TJ Maxx, a suitcase for \$40? I know how much those suitcases cost. I grew up buying suitcases at TJ Maxx. I know every aisle in TJ Maxx. What is it? Really, is 65 bucks going to change your life?

**Mike:** [00:14:14] No. And I think part of it is that I don't even, myself, know the distinction between when I honestly am not concerned, and like in my mind, I'm really joking, versus when I really am concerned. Like I think that that line has probably blurred for me.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:14:34] What Mike just said is really important. Did you catch it? He said, at this point, I don't even know the distinction between when I'm joking and when I'm actually concerned. What a great example of how small habits or small jokes can exact an enormous cost on you. Now, some of you have heard me talk about how I used to jokingly call myself a skinny Indian guy. For years, I was 127 pounds, and in part to cope with it, I would joke about being skinny.

And the truth is, I was rewarded for that joke, I would get a little haha, but in reality, it actually costed me a lot, because when I finally decided to make a change, to learn how to lift weights and put on some muscle, I had created this identity for myself of being just a skinny Indian guy. And looking back, I wish I had never said that. In some way, we all do this. We'll say things like, oh, I'm just not good at math, ah, I just can't manage my money, whatever.

And if you want to make a change, whether it's to change your body, become better with money, become more spontaneous, even become a better parent, you can, but it gets a lot harder if you've created an identity that's directly in opposition to change. Mike and Tami have been lobbing these comments to each other for so long, they don't even realize it's not normal. They don't realize the effect it's having on their partner. They don't even realize if they believe it or not.

When I speak to these couples, one of the gifts that they give me is they allow me to see their relationship. They open themselves up, and they tell me, they actually want me to give them feedback on what I'm observing. So, I want you to do the same thing with your relationship. As you're listening to this, think about what habits you and your partner have, everything from what you say to each other to what you eat, what you do

for fun, even the inside jokes you have.

Think about what the two of you say after you go to a party and see other people. What do the two of you say in the car on the ride home? All of those little behaviors, all of those habits you have, think about them, and then ask yourself this, are they serving you? Because for Mike and Tami, I can tell you right now, their habits are not serving them at all.

Why does a joke in your relationship have to be at one of your expenses?

**Mike:** [00:17:27] I mean, yeah, I don't know. It's like our way of skating around the actual issue and just letting it fester.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:17:33] Do you two have parents who did this?

**Mike:** [00:17:35] Well, not me as much as Tami, but-

**Tami:** [00:17:39] I definitely think that my parents had a somewhat similar type of relationship as Mike and I do in terms of finances. Like I can remember my dad like taking my mom's credit cards and like hiding them, so like she couldn't use them. Like she definitely was the one who would do what I'm doing now, like spending little bits of money here and there, and then him giving her kind of a hard time about it. And probably, yeah, having the same type of banter and jokes, like that kind of a thing.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:18:26] And how did that work out?

**Tami:** [00:18:30] I mean, they're still together.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:18:32] Are they happy?

**Tami:** [00:18:36] In their own way. It's complicated, and I don't know, it's like a lot, I don't know.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:18:43] You want that relationship for you?

**Tami:** [00:18:45] No.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:18:47] That was quick.

**Tami:** [00:18:49] Yeah, no.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:18:50] How come you said that so quickly?

**Tami:** [00:18:52] I mean, I don't want my relationship to look like their relationship with each other, no. Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:19:03] Most of us live lives that are utterly predictable, we just refuse to see it. Mike and Tami are on a path that is so utterly predictable that if you're listening, you can spot what's going to happen from a mile away, but they don't see it. You rarely do when you are in your own situation. You think that, oh, it's different, we're unique, we have all these different possibilities, when someone from a little bit of distance can say, hmm, I can kind of tell where this is going.

Most of us live lives that are utterly predictable, we just refuse to see it. Mike and Tami are on a very predictable path, and the outcome is not good. The way they fight is toxic. The way they argue about money, it's no good. The place they're going is not a good destination, but they don't realize that predictable path they're on. And this affects us as an entire country as well.

Think about it, if you skip class to work at Carl's Jr., and then you go, I'm not going to college, the truth is, you're probably not going to be a multimillionaire. The fact that this seems controversial to say speaks to how strongly our country's propaganda is, this idea that you can accomplish anything if you set your mind to it. Yeah, that's possible, maybe you can, but the odds are stacked against you.

I had a friend once say, "But Zuckerberg dropped out of college." He dropped out of Harvard. The reason I'm bringing this up is that Americans drastically overestimate our social mobility. We have this invisible script that we can work hard and become rich, but if you actually zoom out and you compare our social mobility to that of other countries, you'll be surprised. Americans are not as mobile as you thought.

In fact, if you grew up poor, odds are you'll remain poor. And this, by the way, is one of the reasons that I'm such a fan of paying my taxes and increasing social services. I bring this up because Mike and Tami are living utterly predictable lives right now, but they just don't see it. They fight about tiny amounts of money. They insult each other. And they're on track to replicate or at least resemble her parents' relationship, which she herself just said she doesn't want to be like.

We know where this path is leading, but they refuse to see it. It's just like flossing. You know you should floss. You've heard people warn you about what happens if you don't. It's easy to ignore it, because you don't really feel the cost, but day-by-day, you're living a life where the outcome will predictably be bad. So, now, what I want to do is I want to try to show them this, not tell them, not lecture them, but I want to show them the path they're on and let them figure out what's going to happen. I'm going to do that by starting off with asking them what money really represents to the two of them.

Fifty dollars, is that going to change either of your lives?

**Tami:** [00:22:44] No.

**Mike:** [00:22:45] No.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:22:45] Okay. So, you're all sitting here fighting about \$50 here and \$200 there, and the two of you make \$135,000 household income per year, why do you think that you're so happy to be fighting over 50-dollar questions?

**Mike:** [00:23:07] When I was younger, my dad had like much medical issues, and we ended up with like a \$100,000 medical bills, and vehicles being repossessed, both of our families eventually like lost our childhood homes and stuff like that. So, I think I always have just lived under the assumption that if we're not penny-pinching, even though it's inconsistent, because again, sometimes, it's like, if I'm going to get in, I'm just, ah, whatever. It's like that \$50 matters a ton sometimes if I'm freaked out and it doesn't at all other times.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:23:34] Have you noticed that, Mike, you're playing life not to lose?

**Mike:** [00:23:41] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:23:42] What do you think the costs are of playing life not to lose?

**Mike:** [00:23:46] I think there's a lot of small losses in trying to avoid the big loss that might never come anyway, especially like when we were a little bit younger before we like had money, where it was like \$1,000 was the world to us, or at least to me, where it's like we skipped a destination wedding, or skipped this, or that, or whatever.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:24:04] By playing life on defense, you are missing so many opportunities to go on offense. And by playing life on defense, every day you wake up, you put on your glasses, and the first thing you scan the room and look around for is, what can go wrong today?

**Mike:** [00:24:26] Oh, for sure.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:24:28] What's going to break? What's going to go wrong in our finances?

**Mike:** [00:24:33] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:24:34] It's not a very pleasant way to live, is it?

**Mike:** [00:24:36] No.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:24:38] What other examples can you think of playing defense?

**Mike:** [00:24:44] So, it's like this grand gesture, where for her birthday or our anniversary, one or the other, I was like, "I bought these tickets, and like, now, this means we have to go to London and we're going to make it happen". And like I also, especially then, had like a deathly fear of flying, which is only slightly better now. And so, I was like, I'm going to commit to this, I'll get my shit together, and time to go make this amazing trip.

And then, in the meantime, because the tickets were on sale like a-year-and-a-half before the show or something. And so, by the time we got closer, I slowly talked my way backwards out of it, and was like, "Actually, we need the money, because we don't want to rent this apartment. We should work towards buying this condo, and we can't really buy the condo and go on this trip".

And so, like walk slowly backwards out of it until we finally weren't going, which I think in my mind, like we made it up, because we saw the same show in New York a few years after that or something, but I think that's like a really specific example of something, where like I really tried not to like disappoint Tami, and also to really surprise her and do something that was unlike myself, but ultimately, I reverted back to my old thinking, and backed out of it, and kind of just like rationalized why it was better that way.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:25:55] And I'm willing to bet, Tami, correct me if I'm wrong, you loved the gesture, he came out, oh, my God, he was thoughtful, he created a plan a-year-and-a-half in advance. Did you love that gesture?

**Tami:** [00:26:08] Yeah, I was super excited. I was like texting all of my friends. I was texting my mom like, "Holy shit, finally going to get to go back to London. Like this is going to be amazing".

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:26:18] And so, Mike, you got all the points for being the spontaneous hero, and then in the end, did you have to overcome any of your fears or change any of your behaviors?

**Mike:** [00:26:32] No, no. I mean, I tried and failed, but I didn't ultimately have to. I mean, I did in that moment, I felt like, but I think over enough time, I like went back to zero.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:26:45] So, where do you two end up if you keep going the way you're going? What's the cost of this dynamic that you two have established?

**Tami:** [00:26:55] I think for me, where I know that I am worried that we're going to get 10, 15 years down the road, and our son is going to be not needing us as much, and I'm going to look back, and be like, "Holy shit, like I'm not happy, this is not what I want out of life, I don't know who I am anymore".

**Mike:** [00:27:18] We have a lot of motivation to be together regardless of how we feel minute-to-minute or day-to-day, because we do have like a shared project that we're very committed to in raising a child. While I maybe extend even further my fearmongering around finances to try to keep him safe financially, I then also do the same stuff to him. And he's a child now, but I don't want to treat him like a two-year-old when he's 16 or a 16-year-old when he's 30. And then, I also don't want him to see me doing that to his mom.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:27:49] Okay. Let's imagine he's eight years old just a few years from now, and mom is going out with a friend for lunch, and your eight-year-old son sees Mom putting her shoes on, and he says to her, "Mommy, don't spend any money when you're out with your friend", how would you feel?

**Mike:** [00:28:19] I would be mortified, I'd be like, oh, shit.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:28:22] Because what?

**Mike:** [00:28:23] Because I wouldn't want him, A, to feel like that's how you act in a relationship, like I wouldn't want him to feel like instead of having like an open, honest communication with someone, that you like take little jabs with them to try to get them to bend to your will. And I also wouldn't want him to internalize that either to where like he's going out, too, and feels like, oh, I might make a dumb money decision, I got Dad's voice in my head telling me I'm an idiot, or even almost worse if he's like, well, I'm a boy, so I won't mess it up. Like it's just dumb. Like that would be awful.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:28:58] Okay. Tami, I noticed you're crying.

**Tami:** [00:29:07] Mm-hmm.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:29:07] Can you tell me why?

**Tami:** [00:29:16] I just think that it's really important to us to not recreate some of what we experienced as children and that we have like things that we saw as kids, like our parents doing with each other or talking to us, we've carried that through life and it's

some of the things that we struggle with now. And just thinking about doing that to Rowan, and then whoever, Rowan, like his partner when he grows up is going to be on the receiving end of what he grew up with that he's carried with him.

And so, I think the pressure of that, just something that we knew like going into being parents, that we were going to have to be better than—I don't know, just be better. And I think before you become parents, you think, well, I'm not going to do like these things or we're never going to do that. It's easier said than done. So, just like imagining that, and I had-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:30:42] Seems like of everything we talked about today, that was the thing that really reached you.

**Tami:** [00:30:50] Mm-hmm.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:30:50] Why is that?

**Tami:** [00:30:53] I think, always, like I'm just trying to be the best parent that I can be kind of thing to him and I just don't want to fail him.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:31:03] This is such an important moment. I'm very thankful to Tami for being so open with me here. This has happened on several episodes, where a couple has a money issue and will spend hours talking about it, and they'll agree, yes, this is a problem, yes, we should make some changes, yes, we need to do something differently, but once we talk about what their son or their daughter is picking up on, suddenly, they're crying, even bawling.

Why? Because money is emotional. It's one thing to talk about a spending problem, or Target, or getting financially aligned, but when you think about your son picking up on these issues, and carrying them into his life and his future relationships, suddenly, it all clicks. This is serious, really serious. It's not a joke. And I want you to listen to me carefully. I had a track coach tell me this back in high school, and I didn't really understand it, but now I do.

He said, "Someone is always watching. If you're at work, and you go above and beyond

on an assignment, someone is watching. If you're emptying the dishwasher at home and you half-ass it, someone is watching. If you fight with your partner about money, someone is watching. You might not know who and they might not even realize they're making a judgment about you, but someone is watching."

The point of this isn't to impress people around you all the time. The point is I want you to develop an intrinsic motivation to take the really important things in life seriously. Your rich life is not a joke. It's not something to delay, or procrastinate on, or to minimize. Someone is always watching. And eventually, that someone who matters most is you.

Can I just tell you, I love jokes? Alright. I love making fun of myself and I love making fun of other people. Half my Twitter feed is making fun of people who think real estate is the best investment on Earth. They're fucking delusional. They had never run numbers in their life. Okay. I love it. So, when I say this, I want you to listen carefully to me. It's actually not that funny to verbally decapitate your partner. It's not that funny. And yeah, you can get a win, but the win is so short-term and the cost is so enormous.

**Mike:** [00:34:00] I think that's like beyond the joking and stuff, we do give each other a hard time about, where it's like, she's like, "Oh, you're always trying to wear me down about something like big electronic thing or something, electric lights-"

**Tami:** [00:34:10] Kayak.

**Mike:** [00:34:11] Yeah, kayak, this, that, whatever, where I'm like, "Yeah, but I'm buying myself like experience and like a hundred experiences, and you're just buying yourself mini-donuts at the gas station".

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:34:19] You're both playing to win at the other person's expense, you hear that, both of you?

**Tami:** [00:34:27] Especially because he doesn't even use it that much. He's got this freaking kayak hanging up in the garage, and he's used it three times. This is exactly what our friends experience. This is how I felt it was-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:34:37] I know Tami and I can see the huge smile on your face right now. You are loving this.

**Tami:** [00:34:44] Mm-hmm.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:34:44] Until the two of you can change this, what just happened, you're going to be stuck here, because you two love it. You love attacking your partner. Look at that smile on your face, Tami, it's still in your face.

**Tami:** [00:34:59] I know, yeah, because I'm just like, holy shit, like I've never really like sit, like thought of it like that, I guess. Like I'm just like-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:35:10] Can I tell you something? If I heard a couple, my friends, saying what you guys just said to each other, I would be shocked. My friends do not talk like that. Personally, I find it so inappropriate, like it would be a huge deal if any couple we were out with said just what the two of you said about the kayak. And that's the least of what you said today. "And the worst part is he doesn't even use the kayak", making a joke at his expense and making yourself seem better.

**Tami:** [00:35:45] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:35:47] So, Mike, I would rather you simply said, "Look, I want the kayak. It's in our plan. I'm going to get it, and you know what, babe, I'd love to take you out on that kayak next Saturday." Wow, what a totally different approach. Now, as for you, Tami, I would rather have you say, "Yeah, I picked up some snacks, and, Mike, I know your favorite snack is Red Vines and Twix, you know what, I bought you a couple of those things, too." I would rather have that. But the ultimate level is that you're both not asking each other about these 10-dollar, 20-dollar decisions at all. You make \$135,000 a year and you're interrogating each other about gas station snacks. Why do both of you engage in these interrogations on 20-dollar questions?

**Tami:** [00:36:46] I don't know.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:36:46] You know.

**Tami:** [00:36:50] I mean, my immediate reaction, you saying like, "Hey, I bought this kayak, we have it in the budget, we can save for it, and I'm going to take you out on it." I'm going to say like, "No, I don't want to do that. That is terrifying to me." And then, me being like, "Oh, hey, I went and got these snacks from the gas station, and I got some of your snacks that you like", like Mike hates that shit. And so, he'd be like, "Why would you get me this stuff to make me feel sick?"

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:37:22] Okay. Tami, I think you took away the wrong takeaways from my examples. That whole example was meant to be positive. You went in there surgically, like you were a surgeon with a binoculars on, you went into that entire story and you surgically, with your forceps, pulled out the only two possible negative things you could have pulled out of that story. Can you try to do that again, and this time, go positive?

**Tami:** [00:37:55] Yeah. I mean, like appreciative, like that sounds awesome, or thank you for thinking of me, or the kayak would be like, oh, this will create like new great experiences and memories for us, and just give it a try kind of a thing.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:38:19] Cool. Maybe Mike says, "Hey, babe, I know you don't like the kayak. I'll tell you what, I put out a beautiful towel, a cushion, I pack a picnic lunch, I would love to have a nice bottle of wine with you and have Rowan there, and then I'm going to go out on the kayak right in front of you, and you can just watch, and I got some music all ready for you". How would that sound?

**Tami:** [00:38:45] I mean, yeah, that sounds like a lot of fun. Mm-hmm.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:38:48] That sounds amazing.

**Tami:** [00:38:50] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:38:50] So, Tami, what is it that you went in with those surgical forceps and pulled out the negative side of it, versus creating a hypothetical experience that would be positive?

**Tami:** [00:39:03] I think because we have such a difference in what we consider enjoyable, like our interest in what we like to do when it comes to spending what we consider a lot of money on things, it's almost like we're trying to bend each other to each other's will, like I want Mike to get over his fear of flying, so we can go and explore cities, and go to all these faraway destinations.

And he wants me to get over my fear of like swimming, and being uncomfortable and unsturdy in certain places like a kayak, for example, or like he wants me to like try and play these video games, so we can experience these things together, because that's what we both want to do for enjoyment. We don't try to do that. We just try and force each other or get each other to bend to each other's will, versus trying to find enjoyable common ground.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:40:03] Mm-hmm. And does it work?

**Tami:** [00:40:05] No.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:40:06] Okay. So, let's stop doing it, how about that?

**Tami:** [00:40:08] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:40:08] In life, life creates enough problems for us, I don't think we need to create our own. And I think you two have been through some really tough medical challenges, you know that life creates its own problems, you don't need to go looking for them. So, if something isn't working, what do you say we just stop doing it?

**Tami:** [00:40:29] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:40:29] It's like quite freeing actually. That old approach we tried for the last 15 years doesn't work, hey, what do you say we just write it down, put it on the fridge, and put a big red X on it. And next time one of us is tempted to try it, because we're creatures of habit, we just point back at that thing, and say, "You know what", we make it little fun, make a little joke, "You know what, I think we're going back to our old ways. What do you say we put another X on that fridge and not do this?"

**Tami:** [00:40:57] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:40:59] Right? We are free to rewrite our own future. The two of you are so young, you're not even 40. You have a good income, pretty good savings and investments, and I'm hearing a complete inability to dream about even picking up a snack for your husband. These are the costs of playing defense. At a certain point, you just stop trying for your partner. You guys see where this is heading, right? It's not a good place.

**Mike:** [00:41:32] Yeah. I mean, we spend so much energy on being like, we don't have a shared vision, I have to convince the other person that my vision is the right vision, versus putting that same amount of energy into just trying what the other person wants to do and just being open to it. We're winning, it's like, but we've convince ourselves we're losing.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:41:53] Yeah. Well, that's very insightful. Mike, I really liked your observation that the two of you don't currently have a shared vision.

**Tami:** [00:42:03] No. Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:42:04] And without a shared vision, you know what happens? Couples bicker over 10-dollar purchases.

**Tami:** [00:42:13] That's exactly what it is, that's exactly what we do.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:42:16] And you spend the rest of your lives fighting over three-dollar questions. You're just playing defense. And in your cases, you're putting the other person down to make yourself feel good. Each of you taking a victory lap two or three times a week at the other one's expense, so you're high, they're low, they're high, you're low, it becomes addictive, as we saw, right, Tami? Love that big smile of yours. I didn't love where it came from, but I saw it. And so, what if we worked on developing a shared vision right now?

**Tami:** [00:42:58] Yeah, I would love that.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:43:01] Okay. You tell me, what does it look like? What is your rich life?

**Tami:** [00:43:12] I think getting to that point of experiencing new things together, like Mike had said, like the enjoyment, like joy of discovering new things together.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:43:31] Specifics.

**Tami:** [00:43:34] Like traveling.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:43:39] Where?

**Tami:** [00:43:39] I don't even know.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:43:40] Yeah, I know. Do you know why you don't know?

**Tami:** [00:43:45] Why?

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:43:45] If you don't know, ask Mike, get his help. You two are a team now. Ask him why you don't know how to answer the travel question?

**Tami:** [00:43:55] Oh, why do I not know how to answer the travel question?

**Mike:** [00:43:58] You're probably afraid of what I'm thinking while you answer it. I mean, you're probably like, "Well, he's already like loading up the gun to shoot it down".

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:44:08] Is that right, Tami?

**Tami:** [00:44:10] Yeah, he hates traveling.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:44:13] Yeah, look at that. Look at that. And so many things just happened in that beautiful/horrible example. So, Tami, her dreams are extinguished like a match trying to light in the wind, never even gets a chance to ignite, extinguished. And they're extinguished because she already suspects the worst of Mike. Mike's going to tell me, "I hate traveling". Mike's going to tell me, "That costs too much". So, the two of you are playing a dance with each other, but it's not the kind of dance where you both

come together, and you're intuitive, and everybody's moving to the music. No, it's the worst kind of dance, where you two are like magnets repelling each other, and it's just horrible to watch.

**Tami:** [00:45:04] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:45:04] Let's flip it. This is just a hypothetical. If you don't like anything you say, you could toss it out and ignore this weird Indian guy. Alright? Try it again. This time, we're going to assume the best of each other. Let's start this way. Tami, in this hypothetical scenario, I want you to tell me two amazing things about Mike. They can be true or you can make them up. Okay. Pick one about travel, and then one about whatever you want. Go ahead.

**Tami:** [00:45:33] He works through his fears of flying, specifically.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:45:39] Great. What's the make the next great thing he does?

**Tami:** [00:45:42] With travel?

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:45:43] No, anything.

**Tami:** [00:45:44] Oh, anything. He takes really good care of me.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:45:48] Love it. Now, Mike.

**Mike:** [00:45:52] Tami pushes me to do things outside of my comfort zone that I really love, even if I'm afraid upfront, and she also takes really good care of me and our son.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:46:03] Beautiful. Okay. Now, we're ready to talk about that rich life. Tami, what is your rich life?

**Tami:** [00:46:11] Traveling and experiencing new things. Like one of the best trips that we ever went on was we did this Wisconsin up through the UP and back down trip, and we really like planned it together. And Mike took the logistics of it. And then, we looked

at really like beautiful type of outdoorsy-type things together, and like that was probably one of the best trips that we've ever been on.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:46:41] Where do you want to travel to in your rich life?

**Tami:** [00:46:45] Just other places like that.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:46:47] You're so resistant to giving me specifics. Do you understand that a rich life is lived in specifics? Here, watch, ask me what my rich life is.

**Tami:** [00:46:58] Well, what's your rich life? I know what you're gonna say, but go ahead.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:47:00] No, you don't know what I'm going to say. I like to eat, and I like to travel, and I like to look at some screens, and watch TV, and I like to breathe oxygen. Is that inspiring?

**Tami:** [00:47:12] No.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:47:12] No, it fucking sucks. Do you understand? That is not inspiring.

**Tami:** [00:47:19] Yeah, no.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:47:20] So, I'll laugh with you, but I'm going to push you until you answer my question. Not for me, for you. Rich life is lived in that vivid tapestry of personal details. That's why when I eat out, if I see two appetizers I like, I order both of them. It's not because I have enough money, that's not the point. The point is, when I was a kid, I couldn't order appetizers, and now, I can. And so, it's a great joy to me to be able to do it. So, please, Tami, where would you like to travel to in your rich life?

**Tami:** [00:47:56] I would really like to take a road trip somewhere to like the western side of the United States to go through like some of the national parks and see-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:48:08] Which parks? Which states? Tell me.

**Tami:** [00:48:11] Like the Grand Prism or like Antelope, like all of those big canyons and stuff that seems like outer space compared to like—or like a different planet compared to what we experience in the Midwest kind of a thing.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:48:25] Great.

**Tami:** [00:48:26] Yeah, I would really love to do that.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:48:28] How long are you going to take this road trip for?

**Tami:** [00:48:31] Probably like a week or two.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:48:32] Fantastic.

**Tami:** [00:48:33] Because I'm terrible with how long it takes to get anywhere.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:48:36] Me, too. That's fine. So, a couple of weeks, okay, great. And you're going to see these beautiful places. What's going to make this trip extraordinary?

**Tami:** [00:48:47] Doing it with Mike, and just like walking, and hiking, and having him like bring his drone, and get amazing like footage and really great pictures, and put together this amazing little like trip diary for us to always have, and creating that together, that is like awesome to do that together. We did that on our trip up north and that was so fun.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:49:17] Love it. Now, part of creating a rich life together is getting the other person involved. They don't always have to love it. They don't even always have to participate. Sometimes, my rich life stuff is just me. My wife has no interest in participating. That's perfectly fine. But, Tami, it sounds like Mike is going to be on this trip, right?

**Tami:** [00:49:38] Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:49:39] Okay. So, why don't you ask him, find a way to get him involved, so it's not just you telling him what to do? Ask him something.

**Tami:** [00:49:52] Yeah. I mean, would that be something that you would like to plan together? I have that giant list compiled, like looking through there to see if there's anything that's doable that we could put together, similar to like what we did with up north trip, and having you fly your drone, and get excited about those places.

**Mike:** [00:50:12] Yeah, no, that would be amazing. I mean, I think that would like open up a whole new world. I think we've traveled a lot in the Midwest, and I think that would be like something we've never experienced together. Some of that stuff, I did a little bit by myself when I was younger with friends, but like I would absolutely love to experience that.

And if we can make it work with Rowan, I think that would be incredible, especially because we did a little more than I did, but I especially like stayed in Michigan when I was younger for traveling, I never did cool stuff like that, so that would be pretty incredible. And I want to do that stuff with you, and I want to introduce that stuff and normalize that stuff for Rowan.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:50:47] That's awesome. You two as parents are giving Rowan a bigger perspective on the world, that there's a life outside of your city, there are different ways to live.

**Tami:** [00:50:59] Yeah, that's what we want. I think we both have that shared vision.

**Mike:** [00:51:04] I would love to see us set plans to go to downtown Detroit to go ice skating at Campus Martius, and we never have tried skiing or anything. Like maybe we try to go to Boyne Mountain, where we went in the summer when it was warm, and we were like, oh, my gosh, this would be so pretty in the winter. And even if we don't ski, we sit outside at a bonfire pit while it's snowing, and Rowan's all bundled up and running around.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:51:31] I love it. Okay. Such a beautiful example, and actually, the first example I've seen of the two of you doing teamwork. That was really impressive. I noticed, Tami, that when you were forthright with what you wanted, something really magical happened, and that was that Mike started building on it. And then, Tami, you

started building on it even more. And the two of you, as Mike put it, it was inevitable, you ended up at this beautiful place.

And the two of you both have a smile on your face, which looks amazing. That's the kind of positive smile I want to see. Now, I understand that that was just one example. I understand that I was guiding it along. I get it. But I can tell you that for the amount of income you make, and for the amount you have saved and invested, that's quite a modest dream.

**Tami:** [00:52:27] Oh, it seems like it's not.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:52:30] You have \$156,000 invested, you make \$135,000 a year, and you've got about 13,000 bucks in savings, hearing those numbers, what do you think about a 3,000-dollar trip?

**Mike:** [00:52:51] Seems like a small number compared to the rest of the numbers. I think our lack of shared vision and our kind of competition on who's going to win, we're actually spending more than that, more than that trip, probably like bi-monthly, just investing in our own shit versus our shared vision.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:53:11] Yes, that's it. Yes, this is it. You two are so good. So, all these arguments about Reese's Pieces, and kayaks, and the reason that you two fight so much is that to each of you, you're picking a battleground. You're in the corner, each of you is a boxer, and there is nothing in the center for you to come and shake hands about. It's, I'm getting my kayak, or she's getting Reese's Pieces or Target, and we don't have anything together, so I better get mine.

**Mike:** [00:53:45] Right.

**Tami:** [00:53:45] Oh, God. Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:53:46] There's no way she's going to get hers. Sound familiar, Tami?

**Tami:** [00:53:49] Yeah, that's totally it, I think. Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:53:51] Now, if you were to truly develop your rich life vision, what do you think would happen?

**Tami:** [00:53:57] I mean, I think we would be way happier.

**Mike:** [00:54:00] And I think if we can flip that script, like I think it would make things that seem impossible possible. It's within our control, we're just letting it slip away.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:54:08] That's beautiful. I love that. And Tami, I love your reaction, too. See how you two build on each other when you talk about this rich life vision, it's so awesome. It's like true teamwork. So, I love that. Okay. Here's what I would like to say. I think that depending on your goals, I'd like to see your investments get up to 15, 20% of your gross income. That would be great. Not saying you have to be able to do that today, but the fact that you've got low cost of living area with a six-figure income means you two-

**Tami:** [00:54:45] So crazy.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:54:45] Yeah, it's crazy to think about, you two could be putting away a considerable amount of money and building serious wealth. I'm talking million or millions of dollars over time. What do you say about that, Tami?

**Tami:** [00:54:58] Uh-huh. I think that's a bit unrealistic, but-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:03] Really, is it? How come?

**Tami:** [00:55:05] Because we are—I don't know. That's not our background at all.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:14] What background is that?

**Tami:** [00:55:16] Like lower middle class, like growing up lower middle class, like I mean, that's just like—I don't know, it sounds crazy. It just seems unattainable.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:27] Yeah, you're talking like someone who grew up in the lower middle class.

**Tami:** [00:55:32] Mm-hmm.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:33] Mm-hmm. You know how I know that? What are some of the clues you just gave me?

**Tami:** [00:55:38] Unreal. Me saying it's unrealistic-

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:42] Yeah, your face.

**Tami:** [00:55:43] Oh, yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:44] Tell me what your face did again.

**Tami:** [00:55:46] Like unbelievable.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:48] Just complete disbelief. You know what your face looks like, you just ate one of those sour patch gummy bear things, right?

**Tami:** [00:55:55] Yeah, no. Yeah.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:55:57] Yeah. And would you be prepared to be the kind of person who's a millionaire?

**Tami:** [00:56:08] No, I don't think so.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:56:11] Why is that?

**Tami:** [00:56:13] I mean, I don't even know what that is, like what that involves, what that looks like. I mean, I don't know, I just think of millionaires as like celebrities, and like creating their own businesses, like Fortune 500-type people. Like I don't know.

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:56:41] Well, I'm a millionaire, and what am I wearing right now?

**Tami:** [00:56:45] I mean, yeah, you're in like a zip-up hoodie, but like how much is that zip-up hoodie? What brand is it?

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:56:53] Okay. Touche.

**Tami:** [00:56:53] Is that from Old Navy or is that Armani?

**Ramit Sethi:** [00:56:57] Shit. You just turned my own question against me. Okay. I'm not going to pursue this. You're too good at this. Alright. Good point. But here's what I'll tell you. In this calculation I ran for you, I only assumed that you were contributing 10% of your gross income to your investments. I did not assume any raises. If I assume that your contributing 20% of your gross income, that is \$30,000—or a little over 20%, 30,000 bucks a year, by 32 years, you have nearly \$5 million. I just have one question, so my dream for you, my wish for you is that you go from playing defense to playing offense.

Offense means we're going to create a rich life vision. We're going to do it together. Offense is we're going to read *I Will Teach You To Be Rich*, the book, and we're going to do it together. Even if we don't understand everything, we're going to do it together. Okay. Offense is we are going to take one trip or one experience in the next 30 days just to show ourselves that we can. And most importantly, offense is not taking the verbal jabs at each other, because you win in that moment, but you lose for the rest of your lives.

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