

EPISODE 534

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:35.0]

FT: You're listening to So Money everyone. February 13th, tomorrow's Valentine's Day. Hope you're not going to put down the big money for those roses. Be smart people, save your money for my birthday, it's February 15th. Just kidding.

You know, I love your reviews, so go to iTunes, leave your thoughts on the show, and that will be a wonderful gift for me. Really, in all sincerity, I hope you guys have a great week with your loved ones and I really appreciate you joining us again on the show.

Today's guest is Erica Keswin. She's the founder of the Spaghetti Project. Let me ask you, how involved are you within your company? Do you like the culture there? Do you feel like it's generic? Is it authentic? Do you connect with your coworkers? Do you feel like you're just going in every day, going through the motions, sitting at your desk, going to work, going back home?

Erica Keswin is all about understanding the dynamics and the relationships of people and technology in the workplace. She is a go-to career expert, and this past fall, she founded the Spaghetti Project in her living room with a group of 50 people.

What is this? How did she get the idea? She got the idea to start this project after reading a 2015 Cornell study that found that sharing meals together improved firemen's performances. When firemen eat spaghetti together, as they normally do or stereotypically do, they work better together.

She was intrigued by this idea, and wondered how might this correlate to the corporate world? To get people more connected, not just with their colleagues, but also with their friends in the workplace? She started her research company to figure out how smart companies are making this connection, and now she's consulting all over the country.

Truthfully, I think what makes this interview really special is that Erica really goes there with her financial history. She talks about how, as a child, money was tight. In particular, her mother had a hard time with it, and she remembers vividly as a young girl getting stopped at a store with her mom for shoplifting. It was a turning point, obviously, for her. Let's listen now to hear how it's impacted Erica's financial life today.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:50.3]

FT: Erica Keswin, welcome to So Money. How are you doing?

[0:02:54.3]

EK: I'm doing great, thanks for having me.

[0:02:56.3]

FT: Yeah, I connected with you through Bobbi Rebell, who was a guest on our show, and she said, "You've got to meet Erica. You have to connect with her. She's a great voice for workers out there, and especially motivated workers, ambitious workers who want to do better at work, but also employers who want to serve their employees better."

You have a company, one of your projects is called the Spaghetti Project? Tell us about that, it's relatively new and it kind of was born out of a study from Cornell that showed that people who eat together, stay together at work.

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EK: Definitely, exactly. A little bit of how I got to that. I spent about 20 years in consulting, organizational development, executive coaching, really helping companies in a variety of ways to improve their performance through people. That really is sort of the thread that goes into a lot of the different areas that I worked in.

Over the last six years, my focus has been looking at the impact of technology on relationships in the workplace, to workplace culture, to the ability to recruit people, all of the different people processes. During all of that research, I came across this study as you said, out of Cornell.

This professor at Cornell, his father was a firefighter, and he focused on the area of organizational development, and so when it came to doing studies on collaboration and positive work practices, he thought, “Well, I have access and my sample with people that I know are firefighters.” That’s how he decided to study that group of people. What he found was that firefighters who eat together, performed better, and sort of AKA, save more lives. Who wouldn’t want that?

What I saw was that even in the workplace, companies are trying to come up with new ways to bring people together. What often gets in the way of that is technology, and one of the lines that I often use is sort of “left to our own devices.” We’re not connecting. As all of us know, we could be on our email, doing our work, and we could look it up and it’s 3:00 and we hadn’t spoken to another human being all day.

I founded the Spaghetti Project to — it’s a project that’s geared to bringing people together, to connect. I have these events, I brought together groups of colleagues, I had one last month for groups of freelancers, and freelancers are interesting because they are either working from home or working out of their local Starbucks, and really are craving connection.

I’m doing one next month, and all of the sudden I’m getting calls to do them all over the country. What I’m seeing, and I do believe that the firefighters were really on to something. Good things do happen when people connect, and from these projects, people are making connections, not only exchanging business cards, but actually working together on projects. Someone actually got hired by somebody else at the last one. My hope is that I can translate this idea of bringing people together into the workplace so it happens more often in our daily lives.

[0:06:16.2]

FT: I've got to say, I love working from home, Erica. That's one of the perks some people seek out when they are looking for a new place to work, a new employer. That's why many of us become entrepreneurs. We want to be able to work on our own terms, and that means not having to get in our cars, and commute, and get to work, and although it's great to have a shared meal and have that team camaraderie, sometimes it's a tradeoff, right?

I agree with you, I think we're working in isolationism more and more. That's hurting, at the end of the day, some aspects of a business's growth, but how do you reconcile that with so many people wanting and demanding more flex-work and flex-leave?

[0:07:02.2]

EK: It's a great question, and I think for companies today to attract and retain millennials and the next generation, flexibility needs to be built into the business strategy. I fully agree with that. I'm not saying everybody needs to come in and have meals together every day, but when you think about your company values, we need to both leverage technology to strengthen relationships, but also, put technology in its place.

That could be in a basket in the conference room. No phones when you're having a meal. My area of focus is both. There are amazing technologies that help us leverage, and build, and strengthen relationships, but we need to think about it from both perspectives. If somebody works from home, maybe it's once a month, maybe it's once a quarter, but there needs to be those, you know, we're human beings, we are wired to connect.

If a company, at the end of the day, wants to retain people, they don't need to come in every day. They do need to create opportunities for people to connect, because what ends up happening is — back 15 years ago, I did a lot of work in compensation consulting, and I would design compensational programs, and what I saw was that people wouldn't leave a company unless they got a bump of maybe 20%.

Why? Because this was the devil that they knew, they presumably had friends and colleagues at work that they really liked, and now, people will leave for a much smaller increase in compensation. Maybe even no increase in compensation. They don't have those relationships.

Companies need to be creative and identify ways to bring people together. The last point I would make on that. Let's say you have a bunch of remote people, and your manager wants to have a weekly remote call. Part of the work I do with companies is speak to them and train their managers on how to have good, better, and best remote calls, because you can still hurt relationships. If everybody's on a Google Hangout, or on a Skype call, and you can all see each other, and you have the one person that's constantly multitasking and checking his or her phone, at the end of the day that can hurt relationships.

It's being present, whether you are remote, or face-to-face.

[0:09:19.0]

FT: There are some companies that are — in an effort to create a culture for their employees, they almost do it inauthentically. They do what they think they need to do. They'll have, they'll provide the lunches, they'll have "everybody wear purple today" day.

I feel like in some ways, that can be very forced, and so how do you coach your executive clients to say, "Okay, here is how you get to the root of your culture," and then have it kind of show itself organically and have your employees respect it more, and feel more like that it's coming from a real place as supposed to — just playing by a playbook.

[0:10:04.0]

EK: Yes, 100%. The way I describe this to clients is that this generation, companies have had value statements and mission statements since the beginning of time. This generation, if you want to attract top talent, these values need to come off the walls and, what I say, into the halls. You need to be able to feel it when you're walking around. How do companies do that?

First is the senior executives, and this can go into when they're bringing new people in. You have to walk the walk. You can't tell everybody else to do certain things, and then have you not do it yourself. I would say an example of this are these companies that are giving unlimited vacation, and if executives and senior managers are not taking vacation, nobody else is.

You have to literally walk the walk, talk the talk, and it's got to start there or it's never going to trickle down. One example I can give, I've met with executives and people at different levels of the organization at JetBlue, and JetBlue has — I mean, if you've ever flown JetBlue, it has an amazingly strong culture. When I get on JetBlue, I know I'm on JetBlue versus other airlines. There's just something really special about it, and even at 19,000 people, they have to — as you grow, as you scale, you have to work even harder to maintain that culture.

One of the points that I wanted to make sure to raise here is that ultimately, to bring it home, first you got to get people who believe it. Then, the end of the day, many of us, and this I'm sure we'll get into this as we talk about money, we act and behave in ways that we're incentivized to behave.

JetBlue over the last year or two, came up with something called the “culture goal,” and their executives, their top 130 people are evaluated on upholding the culture. They need to go to — July 4th is a big event at JFK, because a lot of their employees need to work on July 4th. They need to show up, and it is now tied in to their compensation.

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FT: When I was at Yahoo not too long ago, Marissa Mayer decided not to take — our CEO, decided not to take very much time off of her maternity leave for her first child, and I think similarly for her twins, she didn't take much time off.

All the while, Yahoo is parading in the media that it's giving its employees, and now it's dad's extended paid time off for family leave. Have to ask you the question, what's your take on that? When CEO, speaking of taking the rules and the commitments of the company, the values the company from the walls to the hallways, to the halls, what does it say when your CEO isn't taking much — I guess taking full advantage of the companies own maternity policy?

[0:13:06.2]

EK: To each his own, but as a leader, I fully disagree with that decision. She can do what she wants, but I also think, it was all over the press, and how does any woman in that organization decide that she, or paternity leave, to take it if the senior people aren't taking it? Look what happened to them.

I think that that's the result. I mean, also, the issue of the remote worker, right? Everybody went remote without figuring out those opportunities to connect. There was not a real sense of corporate culture, and the senior team's not walking the walk. It would not be at all what I would recommend to any of my clients.

[0:13:49.3]

FT: You brought up money. Let's transition to money and ask some So Money questions. Are you ready for it?

[0:13:54.0]

EK: I am ready.

[0:13:56.7]

FT: Alright. What is your financial philosophy, Erica? Do you have a money mantra?

[0:14:01.0]

EK: A couple of things. First, it was funny, when I read this question I thought, my financial mantra is almost a life mantra, and one of my favorite quotes, it was actually something that my husband brought to the marriage when we met, and now it's really become something we think about as a family, is the Louie Pasteur quote, "Chance favors the prepared mind." To me it really guides my view of business, money, and again like I said, life.

I have twin girls who are 13, and an 11-year old son, and when we had the girls, we decided to give one of them the middle name Chance. It really is something that we take to heart. I put a lot

of thought and preparation, to the extent that I can, into everything that I do when making financial decisions, and by not leaving things to chance, you have a much stronger probability that things will go well.

[0:14:58.1]

FT: Say it again? Chance favors the prepared mind?

[0:15:01.1]

EK: Chance favors the prepared mind. You're not going to leave it to chance. The work that you put in, whether it's the work to look into a company that you're thinking of investing in, the work looking into a client that you might work with to see if your values are aligned, all of those different things. The more prepared you are, the chances are, good things will happen.

[0:15:25.8]

FT: It's like when someone says you create your own luck.

[0:15:28.0]

EK: Exactly.

[0:15:30.6]

FT: Much cooler way of saying that, though. That was Louie Pasteur?

[0:15:32.8]

EK: Louie Pasteur, I love it.

[0:15:34.5]

FT: I'm tweeting that right now, because that's my 2017 mantra. It's put into words, it's articulated, everything that I feel has been true in my life, you know? Everyone says, women I think especially are quick to say, "Well, I was just lucky. I've been really lucky," and that's true. Fortune has a lot to do with success, but I think that that fortune, it gravitates towards you. You are also able to identify opportunities that might seem like lucky chances, but hey, you are the one who actually sought them out and followed through, and even initially just even recognized that as an opportunity.

[0:16:16.6]

EK: 100%, and we really try to instill that in our kids at a very young age. If you put the work in, you will get — good things will happen. You will get a return on that investment, but nobody can do that for you.

[0:16:32.1]

FT: Bring this to life for us a little bit. In your financial life, how has this proven true?

[0:16:36.7]

EK: I would say for me, it's even — I think about the business that I have built now, on making connections. I mean, I have always been — from day one, if you were to talk to people that had known me for 20 years, what is the one word that you would use to describe Erica, it would be connector.

I enjoy connecting people. I do it in my sleep. It's just something that I do, and I really invest time in doing that. I would say, over the years, by really reaching out and looking into backgrounds of people, and clients, and taking — I would say, it's taking the time to go that extra mile and do that preparation to learn about them when you're finally in meetings.

You know, in my consulting days, when I was an executive recruiter, the time put in to prepare made me that much smarter, and other business opportunities would come out of those

conversations. Did I always have time to do it? No, but I felt that by making the time, it would be worth it on the other end.

I guess a real example I can give is I worked at Russel Reynolds, doing executive recruiting for a long time, and when you're at a firm like one of the big global recruiting firms, people always want to meet with you. Everybody wants to have coffee. You can't do it all day, because you'd never actually get your work done for the CEO who hired you to find somebody for a specific position.

I decided that to make my business grow more quickly, and to make it more interesting, given that I was doing it 10 hours a day, I took a number of those meetings and had those coffees, even though I knew that that person wasn't the right fit for that job.

I did some preparations, see what they were interested in, and I will say, I would then — I was building my database, and two things happened. Number one, I had a lot more people that I knew when I did get a job that might fit for them, but they saw how well I treated them, and when they did get a new job, they called me to do their searches for them.

I've just think taking that extra step ended up making great financial sense. There's always going to be times when it doesn't, but by and large, I think it does more than it doesn't.

[0:19:04.0]

FT: Be a giver, not a taker. I've heard that from so many successful entrepreneurs, and to give it with nothing, with expecting nothing in return.

[0:19:12.0]

EK: Exactly. Because to your point earlier about — when things are not authentic, people know when it's not authentic. Just go. Because you're curious, because you might be able to connect someone, because you might want to help, and not worry about that instant return.

[0:19:30.2]

FT: I love how we haven't actually talked about dollars and bank accounts yet.

[0:19:35.9]

EK: They're related.

[0:19:37.0]

FT: Yeah, 100%. I think what you're saying is wealth building. Take us down memory lane, Erica. Tell us about growing up, and a memory that you had about money that taught you a significant amount?

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EK: I don't know how personal people get on your show.

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FT: Very.

[0:19:55.0]

EK: Okay.

[0:19:55.4]

FT: I encourage it.

[0:19:57.3]

EK: Alright, well, here we go. When I was ten, and my younger sister was eight, my parents got divorced. You know, it's really hard when — there's many families when parents get divorced, money is a big issue, and a huge source of stress.

Unfortunately, many of my memories as a kid was worrying about not having enough money, my parents fighting over money, who is going to pay if I was a gymnast, who was going to pay what percentage, you know, for my gymnastic lessons, and you know, as a young kid, I was pulled into, unfortunately, many of these conversations that were sort of well beyond my years.

My mom had a very tough time with it, and again, it's not as if we were at risk of not putting food on the table, but I think when you're going through something like this, your decisions and things that you do are not necessarily rational. She started, weirdly, even though we were challenged with money, shopping all the time. Shopping, returning things, just really some odd behavior, and she even, at one point, got stopped at a store for shoplifting. That really was a turning point for me. It was very tough as a preteen, going through this and have it in the paper and have people know.

I made a decision at that time that I was always going to be in a position that I could support myself if I needed to. If that ever happened to me. You know, I ended up, I went to college, I decided to go to — I was going to law school, my dad was a lawyer, and I decided not to.

I ended up going to business school, and you know, I think that it was tough, but you know, I think you can come out very strong on the other side. The other impact I would say that it had on me, now that I have kids, is that my husband and I try to talk to our kids and teach them lessons about money, but I'm very conscious of keeping them out of sort of adult only conversations, because you know, you want to keep your kids young longer.

[0:22:17.9]

FT: Yeah, some things are maybe too early for them to really grasp, but I think that gradually, it will all make them more aware of the gravity and the seriousness of the financial world. I think those are the memories that stick out.

I remember being younger and my parents would talk about getting laid off and the layoffs at work. That wasn't exactly fifth grade chatter, but it did make me understand why, for example, we didn't take vacation. It gave me a lot of context.

So what was the conversation you had with your mom after that shoplifting episode?

[0:22:56.9]

EK: You know, it was challenging, but I have to say, I was so young and really just trying to survive myself. It almost really wasn't discussed. We just sort of — it happened, and that was it, and we just moved on. I think it was just too painful.

[0:23:18.5]

FT: Yeah.

[0:23:20.8]

EK: Really to talk about.

[0:23:21.8]

FT: Well thanks for sharing that. I hope it felt good sharing it a little bit.

[0:23:27.3]

EK: Yeah, you never know what goes on. It's interesting when I talk about, talk to companies about — I have something called the Human Workplace Index, and it's helping companies create a more human workplace. It's giving them a guide, giving them a guidebook, because most companies don't know how to do it, and the number one thing that I talked about with them is be real.

Be authentic, be real, and you know, use your voice. Part of that, it just reminded me that when you have a company, whether it's a product company or service company, it's like, let people know, like the Wizard of Oz, who is behind the screen. I think it's a healthy approach to business and to life.

[0:24:17.8]

FT: Yes. When was a So Money moment for you? When, in business and/or in life, you felt like all your hard efforts, your financial efforts paid off?

[0:24:29.0]

EK: I would say — I loved working at Russel Reynolds, and had some great successes there, and in my consulting world. I would say that the culmination of who I am as a person, as that connector, and the work I've done on the impact of technology and relationships has culminated in this Spaghetti Project. I really feel like after all of that preparation and all of that work, I'm really at this tipping point now where everything is coming together.

Sort of right place, right time, and people are craving connection, and my hope is to bring this out to the masses. I'm working on a book and continuing to have these events. To me, it's really in this moment right now where all of it is starting to payoff.

[0:25:24.4]

FT: I'm curious who your average company executive is. What's the prototype? Who are these companies and businesses that are interested in more connection, and hiring you, and working with you? Because I think that says a lot about where they're investing their money and what their priorities are.

[0:25:41.1]

EK: Yeah, I would say it's all over the place. I mean, I mentioned I've been over to JetBlue a couple of times, I recently presented some of my work to the global head of strategy at

Starbucks, and talking about bringing your human to work there. There's definitely some startups in the mix.

In a perfect world, if you're starting a company, to use this index, these 10 things as a road map to say, "Okay, I'm going to — I'm building this from scratch. I have a white piece of paper. What can I do now?" Not all of these things are expensive. This is not necessarily a financial investment, it's really — It's a mindset.

Some programs cost more than others, but I would say these companies really do range. The second point I would make is let's say that there's somebody that's listening that, in a perfect world, your CEO is going to buy in, and do some of these things, and it's going to trickle down. Let's say that that's not the case, and you're a mid-level manager and you have 15 people reporting to you.

I believe that you can make a conscious decision to create a more humancentric workplace in your team, which will A, positively impact your own P&L by increasing productivity, reducing turnover, and making people happier. What are some of the things I mean that a manager could do? Even just having conversations with people about what their goals are, how their job — this is what millennials want, right?

This is how their roles are connected A, to the bigger strategy of the organization, but also potentially to a bigger purpose. Having conversations with your team about how do you disconnect from work at the end of the day? How can we strategize where, if you and I are on the same project team, maybe on Wednesdays, you fill in for me and I fill in for you, so I can have one night where I'm not tethered to my phone?

I think that there's a lot of different kinds of applications, and small, medium, large companies, some very big companies. One last one that I would say, I'm not working with them specifically, but there's a lot that's been written about them.

The company Lyft, you know the Uber competitor, they're doing some unbelievable things in terms of storytelling. I mean if you want, I can give you an example. When I talk to companies about taking the values off the walls and into the halls, the head of HR of Lyft told the story

where their big thing, when you drive in their car, they urge people, passengers, if they want to sit in the front, and the drivers are empowered to have conversations. One of their values is uplift others, that they're empowered to uplift others.

So the story was that it was on Valentine's Day, and the driver was talking to a passenger, said, "Be my Valentine," and the passenger started crying. The driver pulled over and had a real heart-to-heart conversation with this person. A couple of weeks later, a friend of this person reached out to the CEO of the company and said, "You know, my friend was in real trouble. She was even contemplating suicide. Your driver had such a big impact."

So there's the values playing out, because these drivers are empowered to turn the, like to pull over, turn the meter off, and have a conversation. But what was interesting, in addition what was interesting was at their team meeting, they were telling these stories, because not everybody works at a company like that as a driver. So if you're an accountant, if you're a director, if you're in finance at a company like this, you have to tell these kinds of stories so that people can feel the values and be connected to a larger purpose.

[0:29:41.9]

FT: What a great story. It reminds me of, I believe it's the Ritz-Carlton, or Four Seasons, or both, because I think they're owned by the same company, gives all of their staff members, as you were saying, they really empower them to help guests have the best experience. So I think they each get a budget of a thousand dollars. This might be an urban legend, but I heard they get about a thousand dollars per customer, per guest, to ensure that if they're not happy with their stay, something goes wrong, that they have a \$1,000 budget to make them happy.

For someone who is working on the front lines like that, it could be a game changer. Not only for their own sense of purpose in the company, but also, think about those customers. They're going to come back and back and back and back, and they're going to tell their friends and everyone wins.

[0:30:35.7]

EK: Everyone wins and it is, it is those front-line people that, when you get turnover in those jobs, or to say it in a positive way, when you're able to attract and retain those people for long periods of time, or have that institutional knowledge and really connect with the customers, it's invaluable.

[0:30:53.9]

FT: Alright, let's talk failure. I'm sure that you have a very positive take on failure as well. We have to go through our failures, right? So when it comes to financial failure, Erica, what would you say is something that you're not that proud of, or you regret?

[0:31:12.0]

EK: Yes, so this was a tough one for me. I have to say, I agree, you peg me correctly in that one. Any type of failure, I try to say, "Alright, well, what did I learn so I can minimize that the next time around," but if I'm really being honest, I will say that my financial challenges have been when I've decided to either invest with or do business with friends. Given that I am a relationship person, I err on the side of wanting to do that when the investment makes sense.

It hasn't always gone well. I wouldn't say — friendships have certainly been impacted, and I'm sure many listeners, and we've all been, or many of us anyway, have been in those situations. So what I am doing better I would say now is really trying to put better processes in place, more expectation management upfront, or literally even saying, "You know what? I don't do business with friends," and just calling it like that and not even going into it.

But it is very tricky for me, because so much of how I've built my business is through those relationships.

[0:32:31.2]

FT: Hey, everything takes risk. What would you say is a really great risk that reaped a really great reward?

[0:32:39.8]

EK: You know, I would say that it's even before I did the — I think sometimes you wait to have every I dotted and T crossed, especially when I think about chance favors that prepared mind, right? So if you wait and you're too prepared, then you might miss out on huge opportunities.

So I would say that I have somebody in my business now who is a confidant, who has really been helping to guide me, and sometimes you just say, "You know what? It may not be perfect, but you know, just have confidence that the rest of this stuff will work itself out," and after I had that first Spaghetti Project, and the feedback started rolling in, and I knew I was onto something, left to my own devices maybe I would have waited another six months to do it.

So I think it's that balance of really believing in yourself and taking that leap, realizing that if it blows up, what is the risk? I think that is doing that risk analysis, that the risk to do it, the potential upside outweighed the potential downside.

[0:33:54.4]

FT: Sometimes you've got to build the plane while you're flying it.

[0:33:56.8]

EK: Right, exactly.

[0:33:58.7]

FT: Yeah, I love that expression.

[0:34:00.2]

EK: I'll use that next time.

[0:34:03.4]

FT: All the great entrepreneurs say they do it, they've done it. It's just you've got to put yourself out there and understand that setbacks will be a part of the process, but better. It's like you take two steps forward one step back, but ultimately you net growth.

[0:34:19.9]

EK: A hundred percent.

[0:34:21.6]

FT: Alright, let's talk about habit, Erica. What's something you do with your money habitually that helps keep it in good shape?

[0:34:27.9]

EK: Yeah, I would say, one is looking at it in terms of a diversity of investments, things that are liquid, and investing in opportunities that may not be liquid, but knowing that you are taking a much longer term approach, and having that perspective. Part of the challenge is now, as you've heard about my mother, in managing her finances as well, which need to be very liquid. So really just thinking about how to structure it, so that if and when you do need to have money to invest in your business or do certain things, it is readily available.

[0:35:17.1]

FT: Alright, let's do some So Money fill-in-the-blanks. We're almost done. How do you feel so far? Have you ever talked about money for so long or out loud?

[0:35:29.6]

EK: No.

[0:35:30.6]

FT: Alright. Okay, so here, finish the sentence. If I won the lottery tomorrow, let's say you won a hundred million bucks, the first thing I would do is _____.

[0:35:40.0]

EK: The first thing I would do is make sure that my sister and our extended family members were set with all of their kids going to college, so that they didn't have to. It's such huge amounts of money that I know that's an area of stress for both my siblings, as well as my husband's.

[0:36:07.5]

FT: And I don't think it's going to reach a hundred million dollars, but hey, crazier things have happened in college. Who thought college today would be as much as it is?

[0:36:17.3]

EK: Well, right, but you didn't say I have to spend it all on that one thing.

[0:36:20.9]

FT: No, no, no that would be just the beginning.

[0:36:23.0]

EK: Yeah, I would just make sure that I make them set for college, that their kids were set, because I do think for the average person, it is. There's people that are saying, "You know what? It's way too much, and I don't think I'm getting a return on that," and people are choosing not even to go because it's so expensive.

[0:36:41.4]

FT: Right. It's bankrupting a whole generation, and I'm interesting to see what the new administration is going to do about it, if anything.

[0:36:50.6]

EK: Yep.

[0:36:51.3]

FT: One thing I spend on that makes my life easier or better is _____.

[0:36:54.7]

EK: I get my...

[0:36:55.8]

FT: Hair blown out?

[0:36:57.3]

EK: Yes, yes.

[0:36:59.2]

FT: Listen, you're talking to a girl who just did it yesterday okay? I totally get it.

[0:37:01.8]

EK: Okay, good. Yeah, I would give up pretty much anything, including food, before I give that up.

[0:37:08.9]

FT: Especially now that I'm pregnant. Who wants to blow dry? I don't want to blow dry my hair, and I can never get it salon perfect, and if I have an event, it's like the two shampoos plus the champagne, well I get water now but it's just nice. It's a nice little half an hour to an hour to myself.

[0:37:27.0]

EK: Yep.

[0:37:27.3]

FT: One thing that I splurge on big money that I have no regrets, it's my thing, I love it, is _____.

[0:37:35.4]

EK: Well, I thought that was the blow out, big money, I would say that when I'm travelling with my family to a new place that we've never been, I want to find a really cool, hip, amazing place to stay, because chances are we're not going to be back for a long time.

[0:37:57.3]

FT: Do you ever do AirBNB, or you like to go to the hotels?

[0:38:00.2]

EK: I have not done AirBNB. I do want to try it. I would say mostly we've done hotels.

[0:38:07.0]

FT: I would try something like AirBNB, because you might be able to get more for your dollar and just a really cool place. Sometimes these apartments and spaces are really

accommodating, and you might feel a little bit more connected to where you are, but yeah, I love room service, too, so you know?

[0:38:28.3]

EK: Yeah, but what's interesting, I've been following a lot about AirBNB, is that not only are people staying, they're putting resources into better connecting people with these local experiences, but they're also connecting people staying at AirbBNB with other people that are also staying with AirbBNB. I would really try, I guess I thought, a bit more like if I'm travelling for business and I don't want to go out for dinner by myself, but they are really trying to create community, which I think they're at a very exciting point in time and I'm really curious to see what will happen with that company.

[0:39:05.6]

FT: Alright, when I was growing up, the one thing I wish I had learned about money is _____.

[0:39:10.5]

EK: Oh, the one thing. That it doesn't grow on trees, but I don't really think that. I don't know, pass.

[0:39:19.2]

FT: I think you might want to say just one thing?

[0:39:23.7]

EK: Well, trust me, that was what was in my head, given some of these stories that I shared.

[0:39:29.7]

FT: Totally get it, we've got the context now. We totally get why you passed on that question. When I donate, I like to give to _____ because _____.

[0:39:40.2]

EK: It goes back to sharing lessons. When you were talking about when your parents said, giving you context, "We might get laid off, we're not going to take this vacation," so one of the things we try to do with our kids is that one year after a trip to Disney, where we felt like all we were doing was getting, and eating, and spending money, we decided to take them to Kenya on a service trip, and we got involved with an organization called Free the Children.

And a big issue that's become part of our world and our giving is girl's education, and having twin girls and having them see what happens to a community when a girl does not go to secondary school, and does not get educated, the impact that has on when they get married really was eye-opening for our family. So we focus a lot on girl's education, and actually my girls set up a foundation called The Hope and Chance Foundation.

So it comes full circle back to chance. My one daughter's middle name is Hope, and my other daughter, as I said earlier, her name is Chance, and it specifically focuses on projects related to educating girls.

[0:40:57.0]

FT: How awesome is that, and a service trip to Kenya, I want to do that.

[0:41:00.6]

EK: It was amazing, it's very experiential. They literally got to put heavy packs of water on their back and feel what it was like for these girls who have to take four trips back and forth to make sure that their family has enough water before they're even allowed to walk the three hours to go to school, and it really changed our perspective, their perspective, and has made them very motivated to give back.

For their Bat Mitzvah last year, instead of gifts, they said they just want donations to their foundation, and they ended up each supporting one girl to go to secondary school for four years. They're in touch with them, and the hope is that we can go back someday or maybe for their graduation.

[0:41:50.7]

FT: Oh my gosh, what a great gift you have given those girls, and they're paying it forward sounds like.

[0:41:59.1]

EK: Yes, and they are paying it forward for sure.

[0:42:01.0]

FT: Alright, last but not least. I'm Erica Keswin, I'm So Money because _____.

[0:42:05.8]

EK: I'm So Money because I take that money and invest it in people I care about.

[0:42:13.5]

FT: Erica, thank you so much for stopping by in this new year, and giving us a lot of motivation and things to think about as we look for our place in the career world, and for being so open with your financial diary. I really appreciate that. That's always a gift on the show, when guests can be candid and honest, so thank you very much.

[0:42:37.0]

EK: You're welcome. I really enjoyed it.

[END]