

EPISODE 1259

“NK: Probably most importantly, need to watch the mindset and make sure that both people are trying to stretch toward each other from that place of radical generosity versus having the power struggle over 50/50 and what’s fair because as most people who are listening to this probably know, it just never really workout well. It seems like the right approach is what we default to, but it never really works.”

[INTRODUCTION]

ANNOUNCER: You’re listening to So Money with award-winning money guru, Farnoosh Torabi. Each day, you get a 30-minute dose of financial inspiration from the world's top business minds, authors, influencers, and from Farnoosh herself. Looking for ways to save on gas or double your double coupons? Sorry, you're in the wrong place. Seeking profound ways to live a richer, happier life? Welcome to So Money.

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm farnoosh Torabi. If you are striving for equality in your relationship, partnership, marriage, you might be doing it all wrong. Our guest today Nate and Kaley Klemp, are married couple and co-authors of the new book the, *80/80 Marriage: A New Model for a Happier Stronger Relationship*, recently named an editor's choice pick by the New York Times. Now, what is 80/80 marriage mean? Well, as you might guess, it's a play-off of the idea of a 50/50 marriage. According to Nate and Kaley Klemp, striving for a 50/50 marriage is really just a framework for failure.

In our conversation, we explore the shift from fairness to what the couple calls radical generosity, as well as individual to shared success. We also go over a number of tools for making these shifts real in the areas of saving, spending and balancing power. So important if you're in a relationship, where there was an imbalance of income when you want to listen to this episode, and maybe revisit it with your partner. Here's Nate and Kaley Klemp.

Nate and Kaley Klemp, welcome to, So money. It's great to have you and congratulations on the release of your book, *The 80/80 Marriage*.

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KK: Thank you.

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NK: Great to be here.

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FT: Now we got to start off with the title and kick us off by just telling us what you mean by 80/80? I know it's a play on numbers. We often think of marriage equality as ideally 50/50. Why should we reframe our thinking around this to more of an 80/80 goal?

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KK: You're exactly right. 80/80 is a play on 50/50 that what we learned from watching couples try to make things perfectly fair is that just give them another reason to fight. 80/80 is an invitation to stretch beyond that 50% point, to see if you can contribute more than your fair share. 80/80 is really it's about a structure so that you can win together and the mindset that enables that structure to work.

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FT: We're going to dive into some more of the details of that structure, but of course, as so many authors, you come to this book with personal experience, this was perhaps a pain point in your own marriage. I was reading, you were both lacking a lot of time for one another. It prompted a lot of thinking around how to redesign your marriage. So tell us a little about the behind the scenes of your marriage. How was it not working in your relationship?

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NK: Yeah, well, in some ways the story starts near you in New Jersey. We got married when we were 26, at the time I was a graduate student at Princeton living in a graduate student dorm. Kaley, on the other hand, was a real adult. She had a job and she had a IRA and 401k and all these things. So we started our marriage in this dynamic where Kaley was, by far the over contributing partner in our marriage. I was the under contributor. Yet paradoxically, we felt like everything needed to be fair.

We weren't our parents, we weren't our grandparents. So here we were striving for 50/50 fairness, living in a situation where Kaley out earned me by a factor of five, she was also doing most of the domestic work. What ended up happening is, the more we were striving for fairness and 50/50, as you called it, actually, the less equal our marriage became the more we fought the more tension we experienced. This book was really almost like a 15 year journey for us to figure out, is there a way out of that dynamic and is there a better alternative to 50/50 where we can be equals and in love.

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FT: So let's get into some of the mechanics of this. Run me through, maybe you can use yourselves as an example you also interviewed so many couples for this book, but I would love to paint the picture of what a typical 80/80 day looks for a couple that say, that say has kids, both working parents. How does this play out?

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KK: Well, first of all, I think it's worth just talking a little bit about 50/50, which we found that in our interviews if you ask people, do you ever fight over fairness or what's 50/50? Most people said, "No, we don't fall into that trap at all." Then if you dig a little deeper, and you ask, "Well, what do you fight about? What are your conflicts?" Most couples have some version of this going on, whether it's fairness around domestic work, or free time, or money, which we're excited to explore more with you.

Basically, this is a universal dynamic. We think of it as the center of gravity, that we tend to fall into. These are like the default habits running in our minds. When it comes to 80/80 it really is

counter habitual and it's an exercise of almost catching yourself as you fall into that fairness trap. What that looks like, we talk a lot in the book about this idea of radical generosity. That's the key mindset shift, where instead of fairness, the thought is, how can I be radically generous? It turns out that if I make that mindset shift, it's contagious, that our mindset really does leak onto our partner, until we start to enter this upward spiral of generosity.

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KK: To make it super practical and also maybe a little bit too self-centered. This morning, we woke up early, and our daughter woke up at five. I was scheduled to go on a walk where I was going to talk with my dad. As five o'clock arrives that's not going to happen, unless Nate says, "Hey, I can jump in here." Whereas if there's an active contribution, that's radically generous. It's not like it's his job or his turn, well then when I come back, there's a sense of, oh, the dishwasher needs to be unloaded. It's not well, because he did that I will. It's just, that's what needs to happen. So there's, these little moments throughout your day of recognizing what needs to happen and how can I jump in? When somebody else does it for you to be able to say thank you and sincerely mean it.

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FT: Do you promote or do you advocate for partners taking on particular domains as responsibilities? So I've written a book about female breadwinners and to your point, the lack of fairness that can be felt in those kinds of relationships, because of a financial dynamic that is untraditional and one of the things that a lot of relationship experts told me to tell my readers is make sure that each person in the relationship feels really accountable for important parts of the relationship. So they each feel providers, particularly the person who's maybe not the main breadwinner, to take on really important domains and not just helping out, but literally taking care of that entire domain, whether that's food or I mean things will fall apart at certain times.

I mean, it's not all going to go perfectly, but to know what is your responsibility for the most part. Is that problematic sometimes an 80/80 relationship where it's all about doing it all, all the time overcompensating sometimes?

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KK: I think that's an excellent question. I would say before you divide your roles, which we do highly advocate. We find that clarity around who's doing what is essential for things running smoothly. Before you do that, though, it's really useful to check in about your values. How do you know that you're winning together as a couple? What are you striving for? Because you could go do a bunch of things, where I could say I own contribution at the school, but if that's not something that we value, then neither of us should be doing it. So being really explicit around, hey, you own this domain. I think there's a really powerful component that maybe we can dive into a little bit more around being willing to relinquish control over the other person's domain.

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FT: Right, because I was reading through your book and you talk about there is a backlash when one person is of over delivering, that there is actually a thing that is over contributing that can bite you.

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NK: Yeah, we actually ended up writing an entire chapter called, The Reluctant Partner, because we realized that in some ways that the fundamental problem of modern marriage is that there's often as I said before, an over contributor and an under contributor, and the under contributor tends to be this reluctant partner, who's reluctant to contribute may be reluctant to work on the marriage in the same way. So for us, the way that played out, I was the reluctant partner for many years, and we could take finances as an example.

Kaley ran the financial show of our family. Not only was she the primary breadwinner initially, but she was the one who had insight into all the numbers and all the checkbooks and accounts and things like that. She resented me for not helping out, but there was also this weird dynamic where I didn't really get a chance. Maybe you can talk about it from your perspective.

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KK: I think, exactly to Nate's point, there was a way that I liked being completely in control. I liked knowing everything. There was this dark shadow where I also felt completely justified and resenting him, I can't believe you spent, I can't believe you did that. –

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FT: It's not the most rational. I feel you, Kaley. I've been there. Yeah.

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KK: I think –

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NK: Talk about the bike that I showed up with –

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KK: He did, he showed up with a \$2,000 bike in New Jersey. I was like, "I'm sorry, who's riding that? Who's whose budget did that come from?"

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FT: What's the return policy on this bike?

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KK: Exactly.

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FT: What I'm hearing is that, yes, there may be a reluctant partner, but also the one that the partner who is over delivering, might not be as welcoming to the other partner to say, "Hey you should participate in this as well."

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KK: Yeah. It ends up being basically a cyclical pattern. The over contributor says some version of, "Hey, I want you to do this." Or "Hey, I want you to help." Or "Hey, this isn't fair." The other person says, "Cool, I'm happy to help, I need a little bit more information." Then the other contributor says, "See, I told you that you weren't helpful." So there's the control piece that happens with the over contributor and there's almost the frustration exasperated piece that happens with the under contributor, where there it feels like, no matter what I do, it's never good enough.

There's almost be like a labor strike that happens within the relationship, where both people then feel really frustrated. The over contributor feels resentful and righteous, and the under contributor feels, under-appreciated and completely un empowered. Then it will show up in sideways things, buying a bike, that wasn't, what's the return policy on that? Or just not helping or watching your partner do something or getting super controlling about a different area of your life?

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FT: We have to talk about gender role expectations. I'm sure you know all about this and you've written about it, but it is such a force. We to think that we're so progressive or so modern and et these values, these ways of thinking about what I should do, because I am a man, and because I'm a woman. That's been so ingrained in us, right. That it's almost subconscious.

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KK: Yes.

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FT: Men and women are reluctant sometimes to give up on some of these gender role expectations, even when it's killing them. Breadwinners, female breadwinners do more housework than women who make the same or less, they feel they have to overcompensate in the housewifery department. This is happening in 2021. How do we reconcile this once and for all?

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KK: I think that you named it really well, which is at this point in time it's unconscious, because I have yet to meet a woman breadwinner or not who would say, "You know what I think would be awesome. I think having completely uneven roles in our family where it's power imbalance, because of gender that would be great." So it's happening beneath the surface and to your point, I think it's patterned by what many of us watched our parents do, what many of us watched our grandparents do.

So making these the expectations explicit, and noticing how it's happening is one way to start to untangle it. Literally writing on a sheet of paper, what each of you is doing, and then looking at how those roles, how those expectations are distributed, and not then saying, "Oh, I have one more thing on my side of the ledger than you do. I'm going to move it over." But instead looking at it through the perspective of one, what matters to us, what should be not on this list at all? What should be our top priorities? Two, what are we good at? So can we put on our side, those things that we like to do that we're good at doing not just evenly distributing them.

Then also, what do I really care about that if it really matters to me that the kitchen counters are clear every night before we go to sleep? Maybe I should be in charge of the kitchen counters being clear versus if it's really important to Nate that our daughter has somebody to play with every weekend. He might be in charge of those play-dates, because the things that are important to us we're much more likely to do. Even silly story that I think illustrates this really well, that there was a couple that was looking at how they did dinner, and they realized that dinner was this huge stress point. They weren't sure how to divide it. There was a ton of resentment around, when it's my turn to make dinner we get salmon and asparagus, when it's your turn to make dinner we get Shake Shack.

So they're like cool, we're going to fix this by dividing it perfectly evenly. It got worse instead of better, because the person who hated cooking, kept doing some of those same things where it's like, it's a meal takeout is fine and the resentment intensified. When they actually took a step back and looked at what they liked to do and what they cared about, one partner confessed, I find cooking relaxing, and our family eating things that aren't are nutritious, really matters to me. In contrast, the other one is I care that there are calories so that no one box, and so they moved all of the meals to the one partner who really cared and shifted a bunch of things off the other person's plate. They were both so much happier.

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FT: Like even to hear that, I'm like getting resentful. I'm like shouldn't the other partner want to feed our family nutritious wholesome meals like I do? Our values are off base there. I feel like, I don't know, maybe there's another piece of advice here, which is you got to let some things go. How do you know when to let things go?

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NK: I mean, it's a really good question. I think that one of the central themes we experienced in interviewing people and in our own lives is that sometimes we have trouble letting things go, because we're driven by these subconscious principles that shape our entire worldview and for us, we grew up being told you need to achieve great things, you need to be successful as individuals. So we came into marriage thinking, that's the game we're playing here. The game is for me to be successful, for her to be successful, and for us to protect our turf from each other. I think that made it very difficult to let anything go, because it felt again, we were in this 50/50 power struggle, where we were both primarily interested in individual success.

I think one way to let things go, is to really like shift the whole structure there, which is something that took us a long time, it was very difficult to do, but when we did, it was a game changer. Where the goal is really shared success, like how do we actually win together? Not, how do I win and how do you win separately? But how do we win together? And we actually started to change a lot. I cut down the amount that I worked to be more with our daughter,

because that was how we won together. It was actually a step backwards for me. It was a way of letting go, that there was a little bit more structural unless in the moment. Does that make sense?

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FT: It does, it does. I'd love to for the time that we have left. The show is called, So Money. We touched on money a little bit, but if we could go a little deeper to discuss the 80/80 model through the lens of a couple's financial life. How – well what each person makes is never is very rarely 50/50 and yet, that is the thing that sometimes sets couples off and creates challenge and arguing and feeling less than in the relationship, because I make less or I don't make anything. So how do we level the playing field? How do we reach 80/80 in a marriage where there is financial inequality, in terms of how much we make and contribute?

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KK: When we were doing our interviews, so many people spoke to the power dynamic in the couple that shows up around money and told stories, like there was a woman who made more than her husband and she said, "I hate to admit it, but I decide where we go on vacation, because it's my decision." Then there was a different couple where one of the partners was a lawyer, the other partners was an entrepreneur, the lawyer made more money throughout their relationship. The entrepreneur sold their company and all sudden said, "So what do we want to do with my money." That notion, where it's mine is part of what we notice undermines 80/80, that one of the key structural changes that happens with 80/80 is an experience of ours.

Now, it might be that you have one pool, it might be that you have a shared pot, and you have side stashes, it might be that you have your primary accounts on one pool pot, but something where it feels like you are in it together. It feels you win together where, Nate wants me to get a new client, because we win together rather than it's awesome for me and now I get to decide where we go on vacation or whatever they experience might be. I think there's a huge component here that's about structure. How do you set up the finances so there's a pooled pot and then within that a lot gets discussed around saving versus spending, we're talking about budgets.

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NK: Yeah, well, I mean, I think one of the key principles we learned, the more we talk to couples some of whom are doing this well, some of whom were doing it not so well, and getting in lots of fights about it, is that when it comes to the power imbalances that arise from money, the key tool that you can use to bring that back into balance is structure. Like Kaley was saying, if you have a structure for saving, where you have some common pot, huge with spending some of the couples who did this really well who had fought earlier in their marriage about finances, one of the key shifts they made was having a budget with an agreed upon structure where it was like, “Hey, this is how much we're going to spend on Uber rides. This is how much we're going to spend on going to football games.” Whatever it is, it just allowed them to diffuse some of the conflict.

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FT: To share in those decisions, because I can already sense that that can be problematic if the couple is not open to even so there might be the person who's the breadwinner, I make the decision on how many Uber rides we get per month. That has to also go out the window?

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KK: Absolutely. That the mindset that you must have to be able to implement structure skillfully is that sense of radical generosity, we're a team. How does our couple or how does our family have the most exciting or the most valuable or the most impactful life, whatever your value is, using that mindset of, this is what we're after together and feeling you're in it together, on does that risk of, “Oh, I make the budget and I make the decisions.” It's actually just a sneaky way to come back to that power dynamic.

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FT: Yeah, I mean, it's such it's so nuanced, I think for couples that maybe it's their second or third marriage, they're getting married later in life. I see it play out where they're perfectly happy,

keeping money completely separate in the relationship. That doesn't mean they don't talk about purchases, that doesn't mean they don't have shared goals and values. Maybe we could talk about that those kinds of instances where it's not so traditional and you may not have a 50 year marriage ahead of you, maybe you're getting married a lot later in life and you've been through it, you've been through a messy divorce, you know what it's like? You're just want to keep it simple. Is there a way to not do this and yet still be successful?

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NK: Yeah, I think there is. I mean, I think the key thing to look out for in all of these cases is just, are there imbalances in power arising in the relationship as a result of money? As you say, for many couples later in life, maybe they don't have kids in the house anymore. So they're not worried about all the expenses of babysitters and camps and things like that.

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KK: College, right.

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NK: Maybe there isn't really like any asymmetrical power dynamic there that's developed. I think in that case, there's really nothing to worry about. I think it's when you start to have this feeling of one person has more power more control is more important. All of a sudden like that's where you need perhaps a little bit of structure. As Kaley was saying, probably most importantly, need to watch the mindset and make sure that both people are trying to stretch toward each other from that place of radical generosity versus having the power struggle over 50/50 and what's fair, because as most people who are listening to this probably know, it just never really works out. Well. It seems like the right approach is what we default to, but it never really works.

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FT: What is your advice with all the external factors going on that, as a couple you might be harmoniously practicing 80/80. It's working out beautifully for you, but then you go to work and

your boss is extra demanding. You go to your in laws and they have certain they're raising their eyebrows, because they're like well, this isn't how I think you should be running your life. These may seem like irrelevant things, but I think that they do matter and they do weigh on us when our head hits the pillow. I think it's important to address that, while we hear all three of us think that it's important for marriage and I'm using air quotes, equality, whether that's 80/80 or 70/70 or however you define it, that most Americans, men and women think that it is a man's responsibility, for example, to be the breadwinner.

So we have these cultural headwinds that these expectations that are antiquated that that interfere with whether or not we feel we're doing life right, and our marriage right and whether we're really a provider and all those things that it just does impact us. So, what other changes would you like to see at a structural level, a cultural level, what shifts need to happen beyond what is happening in your marriage, but outside in the world for this really to work and for everyone to be successful?

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KK: It's an interesting statistic that I think if you ask people, something like 98% of people believe that there should also be equality in relationships. There's a contradiction, even within some of those belief systems. That's interesting just to start to name an, untangle. Part of what you're describing is also being able to reveal to your partner what's happening on the outside, that those become problematic experiences. Wow, every time I see your mom, she raises her eyebrows at me that I'm not that I never bake cookies for school or that I go on business trips and I'm gone for three days at a time. To be able to reveal that to your partner, so it feels like you're on the same page, helps that stay healthy within your unit.

I think part of what you're describing on a cultural level is, the more couples are able to have these conversations and live in alignment with their values. Rather than taking as given things that were handed down, perhaps from prior generations that don't make sense the more there becomes a community of people engaged in the conversation starting to shift those expectations. So you're not the weird gender bending couple, but rather you have a community of people who are saying, "Yeah, that makes sense. How can we support you?" That I believe

change starts to happen more society as you do it, a couple of friendship, a group and influence at a time.

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NK: The other thing I was just going to say there is, one of my favorite practices that we have in the book, is what we call, The Life Report Card. It's basically a way of really thinking about your relationship to the external world, which for many of us our relationship is framed by this idea that we can just be good at everything, we can do it all, we can be like the amazing parent and the amazing business person and also the philanthropist and all these different things. We soon learn that, there simply aren't enough hours in the day to do that and something's going to give.

One of my favorite practices that we outline for couples is to really think about your life a report card, what are you getting A's in? What are you getting B's in? What are you failing? And the goal isn't to get more A's, the goal is actually to get fewer A's and figure out where to fail more, because it turns out that if you fail more at things you're not interested in as a couple, you now have more time to actually get an A and parenting or actually get an A in time together.

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FT: Make a report card just a few things. Like it doesn't have to be this laundry list, I think you are right. We have high expectations for ourselves. I think we set ourselves up for failure more often than we should, it's we're not being fair to ourselves. I think that's one thing that I'm learning from this conversation is that fairness as a couple starts with being fair to yourself, knowing what you're good at what you're capable of what your turn-ons and your turn-offs and all of that, so that you can come and really be honest in that relationship with yourself and with your partner.

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KK: I love that as a frame, the more if we take the experience of 80/80, can I be radically generous with myself and take that grace into my relationship with my partner, see them through those lenses, those glasses of appreciation and grace, then we can have all of the structural

conversations and land somewhere that's a win for both, for all, for the family, for society, for our culture, everywhere.

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FT: Nate and Kaley Klemp, thank you so much for joining. This has been an incredible half hour with you both. Congrats again on the, *80/80 Marriage*, a must read in these days.

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NK/KK: Thank you so much.

[00:28:45]

FT: Thanks so much to Nate and Kaley for joining us. They are the co-authors of the *80/80 Marriage a New Model for a Happier Stronger Relationship*, available everywhere. You can also visit their website 8080marriage.com. Thanks for tuning in everybody. Remember to keep sending me your questions for our Friday episodes of, Ask Farnoosh, you can email me farnoosh@somoneypodcast.com direct message me on Instagram @farnooshtorabi or you can go onto the website somoneypodcast.com and click on Ask Farnoosh. I hope your day is, So Money.

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