

## **TRANSCRIPT It's Not All Billable Episode 6 – Spouses**

**Jonathan Bench:** Welcome to another episode of *It's Not All Billable*. Today's a special episode because Kato and I have invited our spouses to join us on the episode. So we're calling today, "Put Your Marriage at Risk," or, "What Is It Like Being Married to a Lawyer?"

Kato, lovely to see you again, and JP, welcome.

**Kato Aerts:** Thank you. It's fantastic to be here. I'm a little bit nervous, I have to say. And welcome, Mary Ann.

**Mary Ann Bench:** Thank you. It's great to be here. I think Kato is the best, so this will just be like hanging out, like we're in Liechtenstein and we're all partying together. I don't know, except we're recording.

**Kato:** Thank you. Yes, and that's maybe good to start with for our audience. I know Jonathan very well. He knows me very well. We see each other around the world, as you guys know, but our spouses have not met each other yet. I did meet Mary Ann two times, I think, one time in Liechtenstein and then one time in Washington, D.C. And Jean-Paul, who sounds like a French ski teacher, if he has a chance to introduce himself, has not met any of you. So that's quite exciting. It's going to be an adventure. I'm totally ready for it.

**Jonathan:** And Jean-Paul has his own podcast, so we know that he can handle this kind of rapid-fire questioning and having to think on your feet.

**Kato:** Yes. Yes, absolutely.

**Jonathan:** So we have questions that we prepared for each of you. You probably haven't had enough time to think about them too much, but let's start with general impressions. Let's go back to the beginning.

Did you have any inkling that your spouse was going to be a lawyer when you met her? So, JP, when you met Kato, was she already a lawyer, or was it new enough in your life that she had not yet chosen her career path?

**Jean-Paul:** She had chosen a career path. When I met Kato, she was studying law. She was, I think, in her second year at university here in Leuven. So it became quite clear from the beginning that Kato was going to be a lawyer.

Because for me, she was combining the attitude of a lawyer, the BD skills of a lawyer, which I heard, I think, a couple of minutes ago, and the content and intelligence of a lawyer. So Kato, for me, had it all to become a very famous and a very good lawyer. And I told her from the beginning, "You're going to be partner, equity partner in a big firm one day." And she

always told me, “No, it’s not true. It’s not true.” But as you can see today, I’m married to a very successful lawyer, and I’m very proud of it too.

**Jonathan:** I know it’s a heavy lift. Kato has been all over the world crisscrossing. Last year, I don’t know how many locations did you go to last year, Kato alone? It was probably more than—

**Kato:** I lost count. Yeah. I can tell you approximately 200 days abroad.

**Jonathan:** I kept seeing her and wondering, she must have a great family support at home to be able to run AIJA last year as the president, and even this year traveling a lot as immediate past president.

**Jean-Paul:** But as a matter of fact, when we started this adventure, we discussed it. We talked, okay, I’m going to do this. Am I not going to do this? What about the family? And I was always thinking this was going to be a practical issue and a practical challenge. But honestly, it wasn’t, because I have my own companies. I have my own activities. So in the week, between Monday and Friday, as a matter of fact, I’m not home either.

And so we have many, many, many people helping us: nannies, family, friends, Kato’s mom, who’s helping us a lot, which gives a very dynamic environment at home and kids who adapt themselves really, really easily to several kinds of people, several kinds of situations. Today is blue, tomorrow is red, the day after is green, and it’s no problem.

We are very lucky that we have very flexible kids, very easygoing kids. They adapt really well. I’m very lucky to have family, friends, nannies, mothers-in-law that are there to help. And for me, the most important thing is a happy wife, happy life. So as long as Kato is happy, I have the best of life.

**Jonathan:** So, Mary Ann, let’s go back to our early days, because you and I met when we were poor, young undergraduate students. I don’t think you or I knew where we were headed at all. But give us some thoughts on that—your impressions of what I might have chosen as a career, and then when I ultimately decided on law.

It’s been a long road. We’ve been married for 22 years now, which is just more than half of our lives. Like I said, we were quite young when we met, and even younger when we got married. So in large measure, we’ve just grown up together through all this adventure.

**Mary Ann:** Yes, yes, it has been quite an adventure. We’re at a point now where we’ve been married longer than we haven’t been married, so that’s a big win, I feel like.

When I met Jonathan, it was right after his mission for our church. At that time he was planning on studying English and maybe being a writer, maybe being a professor. His father

was a professor at the University of Wisconsin in Platteville, and so he kind of grew up around this idea that being a professor is great—and it is. It's a great way to have flexibility and spend time with the family. His father had summers off work, and so they spent a lot of time outside, a lot of time together, worked in the yard together.

But Jonathan's very passionate about writing and reading, and honestly he thought he wanted to be a writer. He has started a few projects, and he will probably finish them at some point in his life.

**Jonathan:** In the next 20 years.

**Mary Ann:** Yeah. And I was totally, totally okay with that. I thought, well, that sounds great. I am in love with this guy who's passionate and hardworking and comes from a large family. I think those were the big selling points for me initially.

As he got going through his undergrad, he got some really wise counsel from a brother-in-law who was a JAG, which is an Army attorney, who said, "You might want to consider law school. Even if you don't end up using the law degree, like becoming some litigator, it's just a really valuable skill set to have." He took that to heart and really considered it. At this point we were married, and I really trusted him. I knew he was going to be successful in whatever he did.

Something else his brother-in-law said was, "Honestly, do you know any poor lawyers?" I mean, talk about job security. The world will always need somebody who knows the law. And the beautiful thing about law is just about any interest you have can be related to it. There's some kind of legal relation to almost any field. So just having a legal background can be really useful, even if you don't want to be the typical go-in-front-of-the-judge litigator.

I knew that ultimately he would be successful in whatever he did, and so I trusted him. He kind of took that big leap and trusted what his brother-in-law said: okay, I think maybe we can do this. We can step forward.

Interestingly, he switched his major. He was doing kind of an English-slash-Chinese undergrad and then moved forward with applying for law school. He didn't love law school. I don't know how you felt about law school, Kato, but the first year of law school was really hard.

Coming out of undergrad, we had our oldest son by that point, and this was 2008. If anyone's familiar with the U.S. financial crisis of 2008, you'll know things were tricky at the time. So it just felt right to be going into a field of study that was reliable. I felt good about it.

But he hated the first year of law school. So if there's anybody listening out there who's in law school right now and they're thinking about what does this attorney life look like, take heart. It may not all be as bad as you think in your first year.

At that point, Jonathan decided to add on the business degree, which added another year onto his legal studies. And that was the magic, honestly. Maybe it's not for everyone, but it fit his personality just perfectly. Law school in general is very competitive, and having children at home—at this point our second son was born in 2011—he wanted a sure thing with his job. He wanted to be successful and he wanted to provide, but he also didn't want to be miserable.

So he added on that extra year of business and loved it. He loved the students he was in classes with. It just fit him perfectly. It was not competitive like law school was. Anyway, I don't know if I'm getting off on a tangent, but it really just fell into place the way it was meant to be.

Jonathan and I are people of faith, and we believe that ultimately everything's in the Lord's hands, right? So we kind of have taken our life step by step and just said, okay, we will make ourselves available and we'll just do whatever we need to do and trust and have faith and move forward.

I think it has been interesting how things have kind of laid out. In the beginning, things seemed a bit unsure and chaotic, but it's beautiful to look back and say we were exactly where we needed to be. Things kind of progressed the way they needed to.

**Kato:** Well, thank you so much, Mary Ann, because I think it's very funny that both of you met us when we were already on the path to being a lawyer, or at least being in law school, right? It's not like you met us when we were practicing law already.

Funnily enough, I would think—and I thought that for a very long time—that if you tell people, “I'm a lawyer,” that gives the impression of a steady job, a good income, smart, ambitious. But what I've heard recently from my associates who were talking about dating was, at some point, one of them said, “When do you say that you're a lawyer?” I'm like, what do you mean? That's an asset. And they were like, no, no, no. At best, that's something you can only say after a few dates, because then you have this whole idea that you work too much and that you're only interested in money.

Jean-Paul, do you want to comment on that?

**Jean-Paul:** Yes. If you leave me, I'm going after another lawyer.

Really, I think lawyers create fun. I fell in love with Kato because of Kato and the way she is and the fun part and the way she looks and everything, but also Kato being a lawyer. I think

the fact of being a lawyer, and the personality that comes along with being a lawyer, is what fascinates me most.

Now, my idea is a bit more refined considering the 200 days abroad. If Kato says tomorrow, “I want to be a stay-at-home mom,” hallelujah. She’s more than welcome. You always want the opposite of what you don’t have.

But really, for me, being a lawyer—certain personalities fit certain profiles, and it’s really personal. But I think, again, if tomorrow Kato disappears on a trip abroad and I have to put myself back on the dating market, I think one of the first criteria I’m going to put on the app is: I want a lawyer. So if there are any lawyers listening, you know where to find a good husband if I’m no longer around.

**Jonathan:** He’s already well-trained.

**Jean-Paul:** No, but I really like the fact that when you’re in love—and we are together for 18 years, we have been married for 14 years—you love the person as a whole, and you see also the whole evolution.

You met while studying, and you were speaking of 2008. In 2008, we started our first company. Lehman Brothers hadn’t even fallen yet. I think they fell a couple of weeks after we started the company, a financial services company. So we had nothing at that time, and we really needed to get things going. As you say, you have to have faith and you have to have a certain trust that in the end it all comes out well. But you need to put some effort into it. You need to trust each other.

Again, not to monopolize the podcast: yes, I’m in love with a lawyer.

**Kato:** Well, those are all very positive aspects. But what’s the most—Mary Ann, if you’re really, really honest—what’s the most challenging thing about being married to a lawyer? Is it the fact that his schedule is very unpredictable? Is it the workload? Is it the stress that he might bring home? What is the most challenging thing about it?

**Mary Ann:** I have thought a lot about that this week. I feel like the greatest challenge is also the greatest blessing. I love the flexibility of what he does. I love that when he can plan out his week and he can say, “You know what? We need to go on vacation. Let’s take these five days and we’re just going to go, and I can work a little bit here and a little bit there. I can work on our way down.” I love that, but it can also be a curse.

There are times when I’m like, gosh, it would be nice if his job was nine to five. Like if he was a doctor or did something where he had to be in the office for a certain amount of hours and then had to leave it there, right? I can’t bring my clients from the doctor’s office home with me. There is some beauty in that.

So I would say it's the greatest blessing, but also a curse, because there is always that opportunity: okay, I'm just going to work a couple hours tonight. He can squeeze it in any time, which again is a blessing, but also it'd be nice if you didn't have to bring work home with you. So I don't know if that's the right answer or the best answer, but the flexibility can be both good and a bit of a challenge.

**Kato:** I think Jean-Paul can agree with that.

**Jean-Paul:** Yes, I totally agree that the greatest blessing is also the biggest curse.

Let's start with flexibility. For me, it's a blessing, because I remember going sailing and Kato studying for exams on the beach in the month of June, bringing piles and piles of courses and syllabi and studying law on the beach while I was having fun. Today we go skiing with the kids, Kato is working in the chalet or apartment or hotel while I go skiing with the kids. So again, the greatest blessing is that she's not attached to a geographic space. She's not attached to an office, and that's fun. It's fun to have her around.

Especially because whether you work or don't work, you're always in a good mood. You're always happy and optimistic. So I don't have to complain. I don't have somebody who's like, "Oh, I need to work again. I don't feel like it." That is not happening with us.

For me, the most challenging part is the fact that she's abroad so many days a year. Again, when we signed up for it, I was thinking it was going to be a practical problem. But in the end, it's an emotional thing. Most of the time, you're alone. You're alone on the weekends, you're alone at parties, you're alone at events, because she's out there doing business development, meeting people, getting things done. That part is a curse, honestly, because 200 days a year is a lot.

There's some sweet silver lining to it too, because on the weekends you do whatever you want. We also say sometimes that it's so fun—we are together for 18 years, but because of your many trips, I get to have the girlfriend experience again. When you come, we do have dates and we go out together, and it feels new. And I can take her shopping only once a year, which is fine.

Again, I'm absolutely passionate about my wife. And that's also because absence makes the heart grow fonder. So that's the fact. It's a strategy well implemented.

We also have a lot of flexibility and a lot of freedom. I'm not the type of guy that goes out for beers and then goes to parties when I'm alone. I'm the type of guy who goes sailing, goes wakeboarding, goes skiing. And with the kids—we have three kids, they're between 13 and 8 years old—I can do absolutely everything with them, and this is really fun.

So Saturday morning, we don't have to look at mom and say, what do we need to do this weekend? No. Saturday morning: okay, guys, there is snow, we go skiing. It's nice weather, we go wakeboarding. There is absolutely no discussion. And then when Kato lands after a long trip on a Sunday evening, sometimes one of the kids doesn't have shoes, the other one tore his T-shirt, and the last one has duct tape on his foot because he hurt himself and we couldn't stop the bleeding, so we duct-taped the foot. And the house is completely exploded. But that's part of the deal. That's part of the life we're in.

I heard it at the SuperNova festival in Belgium, a big tech festival. They were talking about how you launch a really big company, how you create growth, how you create success, how you make a difference in what you do. And the very first thing is: you don't compromise. Compromise is bad. It's half good, half bad.

That's what really unites us. We do not compromise. In what we do, we do not compromise. In what I do in business, I go all the way. Even if I have to take every dollar out of the mattress and then we clear all the bills. In life, we don't compromise. If Kato says, "I need to be in London tomorrow and the day after I need to be in Madrid and a week later I need to be in Chicago because of business development," we go. We make it work.

It's the same for the kids. There's no compromise. If I say she really needs to be there to do this concours or this match, we do it. I think that's how we have the best results. That's how we are what we are today. That's how we started things.

When we were looking for names for our kids, the first one we fairly easily agreed on, but then with the second one, we could not find a compromise because she wanted a name, I wanted another name. We ended up with a name that both of us were like, eh, about, because it was a compromise. And then I told her at some point, "Do you lay awake over this at night?" She looked at me like, "No, of course I don't." I said, "I do. I do. I don't want to give my second daughter a name that I don't think is as pretty as my first daughter's name."

So I asked, "If this is not keeping you up at night, what is? What would be something that you would really have a hard time accepting to compromise on?" And she said, "Cars. I do not want to drive cars that I don't like." So I said, here's a deal for you: we never compromise. I choose the names, you choose the cars. We're both happy.

That's how we ended up solving it, and it's been our motto ever since. I'm going to tell you, Kato is always very happy with the cars that I choose for her. And I need to say, our second one is named Colette. Today I couldn't possibly imagine a better name for my daughter than Colette. For me, it's the most beautiful name in the world. So it's a win-win.

**Kato:** Well, I think this is just another way of saying that I'm always right.

**Jean-Paul:** Yes, Kato is always right.

**Kato:** Jonathan, I think you can relate. I think Mary Ann looks like she's always right too.

**Jonathan:** She is always right. I don't always realize it at the beginning of the conversation, but at the end of the conversation, I realize she was right all along.

**Kato:** So Jonathan, how do you feel that this conversation is going? Do you agree with all of the strengths and weaknesses of being a lawyer? How do you think that your job impacts your life at home?

**Jonathan:** Yeah, I think so. Mary Ann mentioned that my dad was a professor, and I was largely in a large family, 12 children. For most of my life, my mom was at home taking care of the family. Dad would work, and he was busy with church responsibilities as well on a volunteer basis. So there were large stretches of time where I wouldn't see my dad either. I felt like I didn't see too much of him. But in the summers, then he would be home more.

I felt like one of the greatest things that I learned—and my siblings and I all agree—is that we learned work ethic from our parents. There's work you get paid for, there's work you don't get paid for, but by and large, there's work. And there's always more work to do than there are people who are willing to do it.

So if you're the kind of person who, when you see something, you recognize that work needs to be done and no one else is willing to pick up the shovel and dig in, but you are—that was a great thing that I learned from my parents. I think as parents, that's certainly valuable, and maybe in our work scenarios as well. It can be very valuable just to let people know that you're the kind of person who, when there's work to be done, if it's uncomfortable work or difficult work or work at an inconvenient time of day or year, that you're still the kind of team player who is really willing to dig in and do the work.

I think for our children, that's an important lesson. I think I could play with my kids more, certainly, and I would like to play with my kids more. Sometimes I do just grab them for a couple of hours and we'll put on our rollerblades and go to the skate park together. I'm thinking, do I need to spend days and days with my kids on end? I don't think my career will let me do that at this point in my life. But I do think that finding those times to work together—Mary Ann and I have talked about this a lot recently—that she wants the kids to know what it feels like to put in a good day of hard manual labor.

There's a lot of value in that, in walking away from a day and thinking, I am so tired today because my body is totally spent, or I did something unreasonably tough today. And that sleep, that real satisfaction kind of sleep that comes after a long day of hard work—

**Kato:** Yeah, I agree with that. I think there's a lot of value in it. And I think there's also a lot of value in showing your kids that work can be important and is important, and that you want to do well.

Sometimes in the morning, I think that's where we get the most resistance with our kids, where we're ready to start the day because we have so many things on our agenda, things we need to do. We're all already mentally in another place while we're making lunchboxes and trying to make it as smooth as possible. There, sometimes the kids are like, why are you always rushing? Can't we just have breakfast together and calm down? Why do you need to leave so early? Why is everything so important?

Sometimes we talk about that and feel guilty and think, if all goes well, our oldest will be off to university in five years. That's not a long time anymore. And here we are rushing away the day. But at the same time, I somehow want to believe that that also gives them the message that it's fine to really focus on things and be passionate about it and to want to go to work. I think that is also some kind of subconscious message that we're giving them.

**Jean-Paul:** I agree. It's important that they can become whoever they want. They can do whatever they want. They just need to put the effort, the consistency, the discipline into it.

I think our main purpose here for the kids is to give them the opportunity to do whatever they want. I don't want to give them a house when they graduate. I don't want to pay every bill or buy them new cars or new clothes. That's not what interests me. What drives me, what drives us today, is to be able to send them to the States, to be able to put them in studies that are more expensive, to be able to put them in situations in which they meet new people, they learn new stuff, they learn new skills.

I think it comes along with resilience and flexibility of mind to adapt in any kind of situation. That's for me the most important lesson I want to teach the kids and the most important thing I really want to give them. You can become whoever or whatever you want. Just put the effort in it.

If you saw us in 2008, both starting, and Kato was promising—I don't know if I would have put a dollar on my head at that time. And look at what we became today. So really, if you put the right effort in, if you have a goal, if you can dream it, you can become it, unless some accident happens. But in a normal situation, on a Western continent, if you want something, you put the effort in and there will always be more work than people. Just go and get it.

**Kato:** Maybe switching to something funny: Mary Ann, have you ever said to Jonathan when you were having an argument, "Jonathan, you're not in a courtroom, you don't need to convince the judge"? Because I can tell you, I've had that many, many times. We're arguing

and he's like, "You're not in a courtroom. You don't have to prove anything." I'm like, the hell I don't. I will show you the WhatsApp conversation to prove my point or whatever. Did that happen or does that happen in your house as well?

**Mary Ann:** Maybe not to that degree, because he's not necessarily in a courtroom, but he does—I mean, he's an attorney, so he analyzes everything minute detail by minute detail. Whereas my general thinking about a lot of things is more black and white. I feel like this is the solution or that solution is the solution. Jonathan will come into any situation and be like, "Well, it's a lot more nuanced than that."

Anyway, for my brain, I always try to think, no, this is the answer. Whereas Jonathan likes to bring out all of the minutiae, all the small things that we need to consider, which is valuable. I feel like there's value in both of us having different personalities that way, because we can kind of see more sides of a situation.

So I wouldn't say it has to do with courtroom argument, but just that attorney mindset of we need to evaluate all of the things. There are times that I'm like, no, I'm just right this time. Right, Kato? We don't need to dig into all the details. I'm just right. But it's not that I've never been wrong.

**Kato:** It's exactly that. They go into details. "You said seven days ago at that time, you said exactly this phrase." I said, yes, maybe I said this phrase, but I meant this. "No, no, no. It's not what you meant. It's what you told me exactly."

And so you totally misunderstood me. Then she misunderstood me, but she's angry at me because I didn't explain it well. Yeah, communication is key. I want to say that oftentimes, yes, as a lawyer, I'm addicted to language, right? So when I express myself, I go into—I probably use 10 phrases where Jean-Paul would use one. But I've also detailed my train of thought and where I want to go. This is really related to our profession.

You're an entrepreneur. You take decisions, you go, don't explain. You use one sentence, which sometimes is very efficient. Problem-solving gets us where we need to be. But then sometimes you lose a little bit of backing, of where are we? The kids also react to that. They will say, "We don't understand." I'll probably be talking a bit too much.

I think it has pros and cons, and I think it's funny how you do bring your profession home. I mean, I can't switch off being a lawyer. I think like one.

**Jean-Paul:** And you can't switch off being an entrepreneur. You think like one. You act like one. I can't.

I'm a very, very bad communicator. That is really—if you take the worst, then I'm really at the end of the line in communication. I feel it every day with my kids. "Yeah, Daddy, explain

us why.” Why? They don’t need the explanation. They just have to understand why. And I can’t explain it. I don’t have the time for it. I’m in my head or I’m busy with other things.

Especially also with the kids and Kato: while I’m doing something—and it can be everything, eating, driving the car, packing a bag—and then they ask for explanation, really I can’t give any kind of explanation while I’m packing things, while I’m taking my phone, while I’m drinking, or while I’m driving the car. I can’t do both.

**Kato:** She can. I can’t. I sometimes envy you, though, because I feel like my brain never stops. I don’t know if that’s because I’m a woman—I don’t want to go into stereotypes—but I sometimes really feel like I have a thousand tabs open and you have one tab open, which is great. It’s super efficient. But I’m—you know, like I see you nodding, Jonathan. What do you think?

**Jonathan:** Nodding, absolutely nodding, because if I have too many tabs open, literally in my head or on my browser, I have to start closing tabs because that is too much at once.

I think we’ve come to an interesting point because I wanted to ask both of the spouses: what positive skills do you feel like you have picked up from being married to a lawyer? It’s a long time. I feel like I’m a bit of a personality leech, and so when I’m around certain people, I pick up maybe their best traits and try to emulate them. I know I’ve been on a lot of calls at home in the corner of our bedroom where my office is set up, and I know that Mary Ann has overheard a lot of conversations I’ve been in. No attorney-client privilege has been disclosed—only one side of the conversation.

Mary Ann, let’s start with you. What do you think that you have learned from being married to a lawyer that might be a positive skill that you might not have otherwise developed?

**Mary Ann:** It’s kind of similar to when I was talking about my black-and-white thinking. I feel like it has been very helpful for me to kind of have to, or be forced to at times, sit back and think about the detail a little bit more. Jonathan is great at that. I don’t know if that’s due to specific lawyer training or what he does with his job, or if that’s more of a personality trait, but he is very good at that. He’s very detail-oriented, and that’s something I would like to be better at.

I am more big picture. When we have a project at home or it’s Saturday and we need to clean up, I’m like, I just want everything to look good. I want to clean everything quickly. But he shines in the detail of one project. So I’ll have a list of 10 things I want to get done; he will take one thing and really dive in. So, you know, we’re cleaning the garage—he wants to really organize the tools and fine-tune the little details. And I’m like, but I just want it to look good.

So there is value in his skill to be able to break things down and really focus on those fine details, which sometimes I overlook because I want big-picture stuff. Again, I feel like that can be very complementary. On the opposite side, sometimes I get frustrated because I'm like, I just want this thing done, but he wants to focus on the small things.

Besides learning how to really fine-tune the details, he is excellent at appreciating the moment. This could be a personality difference too, but just enjoying life and appreciating the moment when he has it. That could be because as an attorney he is pretty busy, and so his ability to come home and swing in and enjoy the kids in that moment—whereas I'm with them the majority of the time, and sometimes you lose a little bit of that because you're with them all the time.

I'm primarily the one that does consequences, for example, and then dad can come home and be a little bit of the superhero. But I love that he takes time to sit down and focus with the kids and say, okay, I need to appreciate this moment because it's fleeting. And I think, Kato, you touched on that a little bit—that it goes by so fast, the time with the kids, life in general.

I feel like he does a better job of saying, I'm going to capture this moment and appreciate the kids for what they are in this moment and just try to hold on to that a little bit longer. So I think making more time like that would be something I could glean from his experience.

**Jonathan:** Jean-Paul?

**Kato:** I can relate to that. And I have a top tip for you, Mary Ann: use it. If he wants to go thoroughly through that small closet in the garage and he really wants to pick every piece out and arrange it and clean it with the toothbrush, use it. Kato is exactly the same. If she starts cleaning the house, she disappears in the house. I'll find her back, I think, 12 or 14 hours later, and everything is also cleaned. I can't get to her level of perfectionism, and I don't want to fight it either. I just need to be patient.

So I say, "Honey, if you want to go really, really thoroughly in this, just go. I will do something else. I will go and sit in the sun. I will walk with the kids." And when we go back, she has this huge feeling of accomplishment because she did the house with the toothbrush, and I'm very happy because I can really enjoy a house which is beautiful in the finest detail. So that's just a tip.

What I learned from Kato is a bit more serious. I don't know if you can relate to it, because I'm coming from a family of six. When you have this big family, there are two types of family culture. You have the family culture in which they fight all the time, have discussions all the time, argue with each other. And then you have the type of family which on the surface

looks really, really cool. Everybody adapts. Everybody comes along, at least on the first level.

What do you learn? Because I come from that second type of family. You just learn to navigate around everything that's fishy, tricky, that can start a fight. You really learn to adapt yourself to the situation. Everything that's difficult or can cause an argument or a fight, you just walk around.

So when I met Kato, for me it was difficult to confront her with the brutal facts, to say things like they were, to not sugarcoat everything. I come from a family where everything is sugarcoated. I don't like it, but I understand it. It's not that bad—but inside, you're dying. You're burning. You're like, rah, I want to kill you, but you can't say it because then we're too much. And if we start killing each other, then we don't have the big family anymore. We have a small family, and it doesn't work like that.

So that's really something I learned from Kato: confront the brutal facts, give the brutal truth, say what you think, and then we can work together to solve the problem. Because I can tell Kato, in all brutality or all the facts as they are, and her first reaction—if you know Kato a bit—is like blah, but five minutes later, “You know, I was thinking, maybe you're right. Let's sit together. Let's discuss this.”

That's really something that I learned. This morning we were in the kitchen, and my second daughter asked for a sleepover. We said, “You know, it's the weekend, Mom is home. We're not going to organize sleepovers. We're really going to do something, just the five of us.” And she was like, wow, and really pissed off. I said, behave yourself, that's not the way. She goes away. Two minutes later she comes back: “You're right. I'm really, really sorry, guys. I love you guys. Let's hug. I'm so happy that we do something with the five of us.” And you know what I said? “You're just like your mom.”

**Kato:** So it is true that I've been brought up this way: just say what you think. Maybe my family was a bit too blunt sometimes, I think. But that is what brought us together—that you can be blunt but then add love to it. Say what you think, but add love to it. Don't keep everything behind closed doors and don't hide from each other, right? So we try to be open in a respectful way, which I think is a really great compromise coming from my family and his family.

**Jean-Paul:** Yes, because I can tell you, the first family dinners at Kato's place, I was shoveling on my chair like this. I really didn't know what happened. I said, are they going to kill each other right now? And then five minutes later, “Ah, but I love you.” So it was quite an emotional roller coaster at Kato's place a couple of years ago.

**Jonathan:** Kato, I think we talked about that in a prior episode, about how I had struggled with my first law firm environment. For me, the important part is to begin and end the conversation with, well, in a family context: I love you. I trust you. I want to have a hard conversation with you, and that's not going to change the way that I feel about you or how I accept you.

So then you can have the hard conversation, and then you bookend it with, by the way, I love you, I trust you, and I want to keep working on our relationship together. Moving that over into the work context, there's an analog for that. And that's how I manage because that's how I need to be managed. For me, it begins and ends with the relationship. And then once we're in the safe space in between, I can have a hard conversation. I can say things, and maybe I might get out of control a little bit with the bluntness of the way I might say something, rather than trying to think, well, I need to massage this the right way to make sure I'm getting the message across and not hurting feelings. So I try to do that.

But it is fun to hear both of you talk about the exchange of values, the exchange of how this works. Maybe we have time for one more question, and this one is for the spouses: if you had the opportunity, would you go to law school, and what kind of lawyer do you think you would be?

**Kato:** Mary Ann, you can go first.

**Mary Ann:** You want me to go first? You need time to think, is that why?

I actually think it would be really fascinating. The more that I—I don't know. I feel like growing up in school, I'm sure they tried to teach me about government and law and all that, and it just didn't really sink in. The more experience I have with Jonathan working in various aspects of the law, and then the more I work with my children and teach them about government and law, the more fascinated I am by it, honestly.

So I don't know—constitutional law? I don't know what area. I'm not sure. I think it would be fascinating. I think I would probably enjoy law school. I enjoy learning about history and government in general, so it's hard to pin down one type of law. I'm going to defer some more, maybe think about it some more. But I think I would enjoy law school.

**Kato:** Jonathan, what practice would you advise for her?

**Jonathan:** So I work with entrepreneurs. I'm in the startup space. I'm a commercial transactional lawyer. I tell people that I work in the happy part of the law, where usually we have really good problems that we're trying to solve, which is how do we expand to a new market? How do we bring on new partners? How do we make sure that everyone is secure in their relationship so that then we can go forward with business as intended?

The law is not the part that is the restriction. The law is kind of the framework for making everyone know we're secure in these relationships. Let's move forward together and build, build, build. So that's where I sit.

Mary Ann has a huge heart. She is a great person. She's also an exceptional thinker. I don't think she knew that about herself when we met. I think she was still figuring things out, as I was too. But I think that she does a great job of analyzing things, and she has this great care for people.

I think that I could see her as some type of government or nonprofit lawyer where she could pick the mission that she was most invested in. Maybe that is teaching people about the law, or maybe it's educating, or maybe it's helping refugees. But I could see her diving in very deeply and passionately and successfully into any of those areas where she felt aligned with the mission first, and then she could use her skills to the best advantage to help whatever group she was committed to.

**Mary Ann:** Yep, that sounds right.

**Kato:** That's nice. So now we have to disclose the fact that Jean-Paul actually went to law school.

**Jean-Paul:** Yes, and failed miserably also.

**Jonathan:** Yeah. I can commiserate because I wanted to quit all through my first year. Second year got better, but first year was absolutely horrid for me—mental health, physical health. I was in probably the worst year of my life in the first year of law school.

**Jean-Paul:** I was in the best years of my life, but it was not for the good reason. It was not for the right reason.

But actually, when I see Kato driving and meeting all these people through AIJA and colleagues, sometimes I'm thinking, oh, you should be a little bit more serious. Because for me, the M&A part is the one that attracts me more—buy and build, sell these things, the art of making a deal, to go there and sell companies and provide a framework and find the sweet spot and work toward some crescendo, toward a solution, toward a deal that makes a big difference. So building things is quite important to me.

The M&A part attracts me because today I'm at the other side of the table. That's why I'm really well helped by lawyers from Lydian.

**Kato:** I wonder if you would be a good public prosecutor as well. We often joke that in our couple I'm certainly the one that wants to follow the rules, and if there is a rule that he can

break, he'll definitely do it—not important rules, but if someone else breaks the rules, gosh, he identifies that very well. So I wonder if he could be a really good public prosecutor.

**Jean-Paul:** I think he would.

**Jonathan:** He needs to be at the M&A table. That's exactly my personality perfectly. So Jean-Paul, you just needed to stick around a little bit longer.

And I've thought about this too, because as I look at the whole range of lawyers in the world, the ones most likely to leave a law firm and start a business or go into entrepreneurial ventures are the kind of lawyers that I practice with, because it attracts people like us who like being on both sides of the table—business and legal. We want to write the rules. We want no rules to apply to us. We want the rules to apply to our advantage against everyone else. So perfectly. You're not flawed at all. You're exactly where you belong.

**Jean-Paul:** But I really need the framework. And I really need the professional, the specialist, the head next to me because I lack patience. I go just foot up front and let's do this. First we say yes, and then we'll figure out how. All these kinds of things make it so that I need to be really, really, really well surrounded. Otherwise, I wouldn't be as successful as I am today.

**Kato:** I think that's really a good summary, actually. We say yes, and then we'll figure out how. That pretty much sums it up, living with a lawyer, right?

**Mary Ann:** Yes.

**Jonathan:** You will get it done. We'll just figure out how. There's no question there in the middle that we can't figure out how to get from where we are to where we need to be.

Well, thank you both—Mary Ann, Jean-Paul, Kato. It's been so much fun to do this episode. This was Kato's idea, to invite the spouses, and I love it. I think it's been a fantastic experience.

Hope those of you who are listening can resonate. Hopefully some of this resonates with the way that you're feeling, no matter where you're sitting in relation to the practice of law. So we will see you next time.

**Kato:** Thank you very much.