

Coffee Talk: Two Sugars One Life To What End?

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I remember an argument from years ago. We were fighting about a dishwasher.

Not whether to buy one. Not whether it was broken. We were fighting about *how the dishes were loaded*. Forks up or forks down. The correct quadrant for coffee mugs. Whether the cutting board was “blocking the spray arm” or “fine.”

Twenty minutes. Exposed nerves. Exposed character flaws. All over dish placement.

And somewhere around minute fifteen, mid-sentence, a question landed in my head that I didn't want to hear:

To what end?

What was I actually trying to win here? What was the prize? “You're right, Clayton, the forks should face up, I've been a fool all these years”? Was that going to happen? Was I going to plant a flag in the silverware basket and feel victorious?

If you've ever gone to war over something you couldn't even explain to a stranger with a straight face, welcome to the club.

Most relationship arguments aren't about the thing. The dishwasher wasn't about the dishwasher. It was about feeling unheard. Or undervalued. Or tired. Or some combination that's hard to articulate, so instead we argue about fork orientation because at least that's concrete.

But the question still matters: *to what end?*

Are you fighting to win? Or fighting to protect?

Because those are different goals. Fighting to win means someone loses. Fighting to protect means you're both trying to keep something safe—the relationship, the trust,

the basic goodness between you.

When I stopped mid-argument and asked myself that question, the answer was uncomfortable. I was fighting to win. I wanted to be right more than I wanted to be close. And “right about dishwasher loading” is a pretty pathetic trophy to hold while your partner walks away frustrated.

You can win every argument and still lose the relationship. The math doesn't work the way you think it does.

The “to what end?” question doesn't mean you never disagree. It doesn't mean you stuff your feelings down and smile through everything. It means you pause long enough to ask: what am I actually trying to accomplish here? And is this fight going to get me there?

Sometimes the answer is yes—some things need to be said, some hills are worth the climb. But most of the time? Most of the time we're just tired and reactive and looking for somewhere to put the frustration.

The dishwasher fight ended when I laughed. Not at her—at myself. At the absurdity of how heated I'd gotten over cutlery. She laughed too. And then we talked about the actual thing, which had nothing to do with dishes and everything to do with both of us feeling stretched too thin that week.

The forks, for the record, still go in however whoever loads them wants. The relationship is more important than the system.

Here's to asking better questions before we pick up swords over silverware.

Cheers, Clayton

Coffee Talk 2.0: For everyone who's ever gone to war over something they couldn't explain with a straight face.

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