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An inspired podcast hosted by Home Expert and TV  
Producer Laurie March, featuring Chef Richard Ingraham.

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**HEART  
TO TABLE**

Richard Ingraham

Listen, let me tell you. This personal chef life is nothing to play with. People look at it from the outside looking in, and of course you look at Instagram, but you have no idea what's going on. You see the shine, but you just don't see the grind.

-Music Intro-

Hi listeners, welcome back to Heart to Table! The podcast where we approach food and cooking from a different angle.

I'm Laurie March. Remodeler, on camera host, producer and now, explorer of the culinary arts.

Laurie:

I am so excited today, friends. I cannot wait to introduce you to personal chef to the stars, founder of a private chef network, author of Eating Well to Win, Chef Richard Ingraham. It is so cool to talk to you today, my friend.

Richard Ingraham

Thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure to be here.

Laurie

Man, you're one cool guy, I tell you.

Richard Ingraham

Thanks so much.

Laurie

Can you tell me how you got started as a personal chef? How did you get there?

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Richard Ingraham

Oh, man. It's an interesting story, I'll tell you that. I didn't start out being a chef. I've cooked since I was 10, but I became a chef, maybe by the age of 27 to 28. But before then, I was a professional hairstylist, and you can't really tell if you see me, because I don't have any hair. But I was a professional hairstylist, and I did Dwayne's manager. I did her hair for her 12th grade prom. She's a very, very good friend of mine. And I stopped doing hair, maybe about two or three years after I had done her hair. I moved to Atlanta, went to the Art Institute of Atlanta, became a chef, went through the whole thing with my career. Moved back to Miami, and I started teaching culinary arts at one of the local high schools.

Richard Ingraham

I get a phone call from her and she says, "Rich." I say, "Hello." She says, "How are you?" I say, "Good." She said, "I hear that you're not a chef anymore." And I said... Excuse me. "I hear that you don't do hair anymore. I hear that you're a chef." I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, would you like to cook for an NBA player?" I said, "Well, who?" And she said, "Dwayne Wade." And at the time, I didn't know who Dwayne was, because he had just started with the Heat. I wasn't an avid basketball fan. So I asked my students, "Hey, guys. Do you know who Dwayne is?" They said, "Are you kidding me right now?" And I said, "Well, I think I have the opportunity to become his chef." So his manager, my good friend, she said, "Let's set up a tasting." I did the tasting, and 18 years later, here I am.

Laurie

18 years.

Richard Ingraham

18 years. How about that?

Laurie

Oh my gosh. Hey, chef, what aspects of the job did you expect, and is there anything that surprised you about being a chef, personal chef?

Richard Ingraham

I never expected anything from anyone. I knew that it was all on me to do what I needed to do. I just believed that if I performed the way that I was supposed to perform, I would be successful. Not just cooking for Dwayne, but when I was working in the restaurant, that was my attitude. The only thing I expected was what I was promised, which was the check, and whatever that check said. And I performed above and beyond what I was supposed to be getting paid for, so that whomever I was working for, whether it was a restaurant or a client would value the service that I provided.

Laurie

Yeah, knock their socks off clearly.

Richard Ingraham

Any time.

Laurie

So chef, in the industry of personal and private chefs, do you guys cooperate? I mean, are you out there like borrowing a cup of sugar from LeBron's chef? How does that work?

Richard Ingraham

No, not really. I was fortunate enough to start a company with my business partner, Soley, called ChefRLI. It's a personal chef company where we have had chefs all over the country cooking for other athletes and entertainers and things like that. I was fortunate enough when Dwayne lived in Miami, that Chris Bosh lived right down the street. And his chef was a part of my team at one point. So yeah, it would be certain times where I would go to the store, and I may forget a sweet potato or lemons or something, and I would call down and say, "Hey, man. I'm in a bind. I need a lemon." Or, "I need a line or something." He would either bring it down to me or either I would take whatever he wanted down to him. But other than that, I've always been on my own. If I forget something, listen, either I got to make it work or I got to jump back in the car and go to the store and get it again.

Laurie

Right. Where did you get your work ethic chef? All I hear is hard work coming out of you. Where does that come from?

Richard Ingraham

Well, of course, it was instilled in me from watching my father work, and watching my mother work and my whole family. But to be honest with you, I was in the band in high school, and I was in the band in middle school, high school and also in college.

Laurie

What'd you play?

Richard Ingraham

I was a tuba player. I played this tuba. In the marching band, it was a sousaphone. And then in concert band, it was a tuba. And in high school, that's where the work ethic really started to kick in, because you had to really be dedicated to the band to play it for the concert season, and also to play in the marching band season. And then I took it to another level when I went to Florida A&M University, and I started marching in the incomparable Marching 100 marching band. And that took it to a whole nother level, because every single day, I wanted to quit. Every single day. But I just knew that if I persisted, I would be successful. And in being selected to be in such a prestigious band like that, I knew that hard work is what got me there, and what kept me there as long as I was.

Richard Ingraham

So all of those feelings, whenever I feel that I'm being overwhelmed with something, I always go back to those feelings that I had when I marched in the band, and how what I'm dealing with now has absolutely no comparison to what I dealt with in that band. And so that pushes me forward to be able to persevere each and every time, and every situation in my life. So yeah, I'd give it to my parents and my family, but I'd definitely give it to being able to be in that band.

Laurie

Yeah, that's amazing. I feel like it sounds like to me that you're the... I mean, the band is long hours too, right? So you're sort of on your feet a lot.

Richard Ingraham

Yes. It's no joke now. It's no joke. So when I talk about work ethic, I know what I'm talking about.

Laurie

Yeah. Chef, tell me what a typical day looks like for you. What time are you starting? How long are you going? What's a typical day?

Richard Ingraham

Well, it's a little bit different now, because Dwayne isn't playing. But on say his game days, and when I say it's different, the only thing that's different is the scheduling. I'm still up at 3:30, 4:00 every single morning. I try to go and get a little workout in, and then I start work. And I'm normally at work, if I'm not working out at the gym at Dwayne's house, I normally get to work about 5:00 every morning. And I normally leave about say 7:00 in the evening.

Richard Ingraham

But during that time, I have prepared food for his wonderful wife, Gabrielle, their wonderful baby, Kaavia, their daughter, Zaya, the nannies. And then you never know. Gabrielle may get up in the morning and say, "Hey, chef. At 12:00 today, I have a management team coming over. It's seven people. Work your magic." So now I got to put that into everything else that I'm doing for the rest of the day, and be able to manage that time. So that's what my day looks like.

Laurie

Wow. So any given day, you could be cooking three different meals for it sounds like four different groups of folks.

Richard Ingraham

It's about well, with the nannies and everybody else that's in the house, it's about seven people. And breakfast, it's for maybe about four people. But I have to remember that you have gluten and dairy-free diet, you have a vegan diet, and then you have people that just don't care. So you got to have something for them. And then if you have guests that come over, say a stylist, they may want to have lunch, so you have to be there for them. And then if there's a meeting, you want to have something nice for the people at the meeting, then you still have to make sure that you have lunch for the person that didn't have the meeting plus the children, and the nanny. And then you run right back around and you have to start dinner.

Laurie

Chef, you are a restaurant on your own feet, like you're just a whole restaurant.

Richard Ingraham

Listen, let me tell you. This personal chef life is nothing to play with. People look at it from the outside looking in, and of course you look at Instagram, but you have no idea what's going on. You see the shine, but you just don't see the grind.

Laurie

Yeah, it sounds really hard. So all of that to me, like my head just spun when you said all of that. How do you plan chef? What are your organizational tools for you to be able to accomplish all of that?

Richard Ingraham

Well, what I do is I keep a lot of different things in the kitchen. And I keep protein in the kitchen, meaning fish, meat, things like that. Different vegetables I keep in the kitchen. I keep different kinds of purees like celery root and carrot puree, keep that in stock, keep all of these little nuances in the refrigerator, just in case there's an emergency and I don't have time to shop right then. So it's like my break the glass type of situation. But every morning, what I do is I get a list out and I do inventory of everything that's needed in the kitchen, and then I may be looking at the computer while I'm doing breakfast, so I may have an idea when I look up a recipe and I see what it has. And if I have it in-house, then I don't need to purchase it. I just mark it down and I mark either a page number, or either I write down the link to it, so I can go back to it after I go shopping.

Richard Ingraham

Now when I go shopping, I always shop for proteins first. And the reason I do that is because that's normally what your meal is based around. So say for instance, if I wanted to do tuna tartare, and I go and I start purchasing all the vegetables, I get over to the protein section and there's no tuna, now what happens? I got to rethink everything and whatever. So I always start with the proteins first, then I go into my starches and juices and milks and things like that. Then I swing back around and I get my produce at that time. And then I go back to the kitchen and I put everything up first, lay everything out, and then I start cooking. And in between my cooking, I prep for the next dish. But before I start the next dish, I always make sure that I clean all of my dishes. I make sure that everything is clean so I could start fresh all over again.

Laurie

So you're cleaning as you go and organizing as you go. Yeah.

Richard Ingraham

I clean and organize as I go. Yes.

Laurie

I like that system. I've never really heard that before, that protein first and then your starches, and then you're coming around for the produce. I do that all wrong. I feel like I'm in a grocery store, and I get excited about the produce section because it's so colorful and fun.

Richard Ingraham

You got to have a game plan. You got to have a game plan when you get there, because if you don't, two things are going to happen. You're going to get confused and stay in there too long. And then you're going to wind up buying things that you really don't need to purchase.

Laurie

Whoa, I have been there. I can't even tell you how many times there's like a cauliflower in my fridge, and it's just staring at me, and I didn't do anything.

Richard Ingraham

Oh, yeah. You bought it because it's purple, or you bought it because it's a different color, and you said, "Oh my God, I'm going to make that." And you take it home and next thing you know it got black spots on it, because it's been in your refrigerator a month, and you wonder what were you thinking in the first place? Don't hold your head down. It's okay.

Laurie

I'm so guilty of that chef.

Richard Ingraham

You're embarrassed right now.

Laurie

I'm guilty of that, for sure. Chef, are you saying that you're in the grocery store every single day you're at work? Is it possible?

Richard Ingraham

Every day.

Laurie

Every day.

Richard Ingraham

I go every day. Listen, let me tell you something. Sometimes I go to three different grocery stores in a day.

Laurie

Wow. Oh my goodness.

Richard Ingraham

Because one grocery store may have this one particular item that I really want to use. I go to one grocery store here, it's called Bristol Farms. I use them for all of my meat, I use them for all of my fish, but then I have to go to like Ralph's because Ralph's has my smoke sun-dried tomatoes that I like to use. And then I go over to Gelson's, because they have a couple of things that I like over there, more so than anybody else. So yeah, sometimes I'm hitting three grocery stores in one trip. And it's great, because I go

every day, so the people begin to know your face. Of course, they see the glasses so they remember the glasses, and we start talking. And then you form a relationship. So say for instance, for Thanksgiving, I needed two special size turkeys, they were able to provide that, they were able to provide the special cutter roasts that I wanted. So you form relationships.

Laurie

Chef, I would never have guessed that that's where you were headed. But of course, I mean, you are one of the friendliest people I have ever talked to. So I imagine you get in that grocery store, and like you said, the glasses are super memorable, but I would never-

Richard Ingraham

Yeah. It's the conversation piece.

Laurie

Yeah. But is that something that you think home cooks can really... Can somebody go to their grocery store and connect to the person who's setting out the produce or make a friend in their grocery store? Is that a thing?

Richard Ingraham

You know how it starts, "Hey, how you doing?" That's how it starts. I'm dead serious. I'm dead serious. Nobody talks to these people. Nobody talks to them. What you do is you give them orders, or you get pissed off because you can't find the spinach. But if you opened your eyes, you'll see that it's right over there. And normally when you see these people, their heads in a box, and they're trying to put things together. So just going by them and saying, "Hey, man, how you doing today?" They'll look up and say, "Hey, how you doing?" You know what? They remember you. So the next time you come, you don't catch them off guard. You say, "How you doing?" They look at you and they say, "Hey, how are you? Can I help you with something?" Now you in when they say, "Can I help you with something?" And there you go. It's just that simple.

Laurie

I love that. I feel like that's so neat. I imagine with all the different people that you're cooking for, there's probably just a ton of different preferences that you have to keep track of and having somebody in your corner to help you track down certain things is probably really helpful for that.

Richard Ingraham

It definitely is. Because besides my mind going 1000 miles a minute with trying to figure out ideas, every once in a while your client will say to you, "Hey, chef. Have you ever heard of so and so? Why don't we try to see if we can make that?" And my clients love to challenge me.

Laurie

Like what? Like what, chef? What's the most recent challenge Gabrielle or Dwayne gave you?

Richard Ingraham

The most recent challenge and I haven't made it yet, I'm going to make it as a matter of fact, tomorrow. She saw these like lemon bars, gluten-free... No. Sour cream lemon bars. They're gluten-free. And she

said, "Well, do you think that you'd be able to make them dairy-free for me?" And so now it's a challenge, and she knows it's a challenge. If they bring in, let's say for instance, if they go to a restaurant and she brings in some gluten-free biscuits, and she says, "Oh my God, these biscuits are amazing." It's guaranteed she's going to have some gluten-free biscuits from me the next morning. Because I will not be denied. I will not be denied. You're not bringing foreign product in here and telling me how good something tastes, and going to think that you're going to get away with that. No. You eating biscuits again tomorrow morning. And the morning after that, if I don't get the satisfactory response that I need.

Laurie

I love it. Do you think at this point they've got your number chef, and now they're bringing those things to you, because they're just like, "Nothing to see here. Chef, what do you think of this?"

Richard Ingraham

Listen, and they know I can't help myself, so they don't even try to hide it anymore. They'll come in and they'll just leave some stuff out. And I'm like, "What the hell? What is this?" "Oh, we had such and such." And I'm like, "Okay, no problem." And the next morning or that next afternoon, they having it again, but my way.

Laurie

I love it so much. Man, I'm going to start sending you stuff and being like, "Hey, chef."

Richard Ingraham

"Hey, chef. Chef, have you ever heard of this before?" Next day you know, it's frozen and at your door. I've made it.

Laurie

It seems like your brain is just such a busy place. I mean, I think people at home too, all of us, it's a shifting landscape, right? What your kids want to eat, what you're trying to eat, like as you incorporate different, I don't know if we even just call them diets, but just different ways of eating, whether you're plant based or you're trying to be gluten or dairy-free. I think all of these things can make a home cook, it can make your head spin. Suddenly things you used to count on, even your condiments, your mixers, these things they fall out of favor if you shift diets quickly. Any thoughts on how... I mean like how do you organize your brain through all of that? And what can somebody at home sort of learn from you?

Richard Ingraham

It is difficult. It is difficult to switch gears all of a sudden. But just like with a pandemic, it's very difficult to switch from going to work every day to being on the computer. But you do it. And the way that you do it is you become organized. You get up in the morning, and I know we're talking about food but right quick with the whole computer thing, you get up in the morning, you organize yourself, you already have your computer set up from the night before so you don't have to worry about it. Same thing with cooking. You have to be organized. Get you what we call, *mise en place*. M-I-S-E E-N P-L-A-C-E. That's *mise en place*. That's your ingredients. Get all of those things together, and have them right next to the stove.



Richard Ingraham

And when you have all your ingredients already chopped, put into loose yellow bowls or whatever it is you're going to use, now it's just cook and dump. You putting stuff in, cooking, seasoning a little bit, tasting as you go. Let's put on a little music and relax yourself a little bit, and make it a joyous occasion. If you need to get a little vino, you get that. If you don't drink, get yourself a nice little lemonade. Sip on your lemonade, listen to some jazz, if that's what you're into, and just cook and have a great time. It becomes therapeutic. So it's only hard because you're making it hard, because you don't want to think out of the box. You only see the blockades that are in your way, and you're the one that's putting them in your way. Just be organized.

Laurie

Chef, I spend a lot of time working with HGTV and I do a lot of makeovers. And one of the rooms that we make over pretty frequently is the kitchen. I feel like the reason we end up in the kitchen is it's the heart of the home, you're in it a couple of times a day. You're making lunches out of there for kids or people going to work. You're snacking out of it. There's also just organization in it too, things you need through the day or the way you set the table. All that stuff could be in the kitchen too. Some people like in California the laundry is in the kitchen. Your kitchen is the busiest place in the house. So I really like to organize the kitchen and set up systems that make sense for people. Because I think once you create the system, it's very easy to work it. What are your thoughts on that? How do you feel about systems?

Richard Ingraham

I definitely think that you need to have systems. You need to have drawers for your spices. You need to have separate drawers for your knives and for spoons. Your wooden spoons need to be in a certain spot as opposed to your spatulas. Your metal spoons need to be someplace else. And it needs to work, it needs to be able to flow. Your refrigerator needs to be in a certain position. So when you're designing a kitchen, when you're trying to, even if you're already in your home, when you're setting up your kitchen, you need to really be cognizant of how you move in your kitchen. Therefore, set your kitchen up so that it's kind of a funkshway situation, so that you can move and flow like water.

Richard Ingraham

And then what that does is it calms your soul, because you're able to move around freely. And then when you become organized and you freed your soul because you're able to move freely, now cooking becomes a joy instead of something that's tedious. And it's just about being prepared. Why don't you cook yourself some rice and put it in the refrigerator so that the only thing you have to do now is warm that rice up and maybe make a whatever it is that you're going to make to put over the rice. That's one step that you have eliminated.

Richard Ingraham

Rice keeps in the refrigerator for up to a week almost. You could do the same thing with Quinoa. You could do the same thing with chickpeas. Get canisters, cook those things ahead, keep them in a refrigerator. The only thing you have to worry about now is your vegetable and your protein. And if you're a vegan, the only thing you have to worry about is your vegetable.

Laurie

Yeah. I love that. Chef, your food, I follow you on Instagram. Your food is so colorful, it's so flavorful looking.

Richard Ingraham

Thank you.

Laurie

I know you're cooking for people who are watching what they eat. How do you make food look that good and taste that good if you're sort of watching what you eat?

Richard Ingraham

Well, when you talk about eating better, eating healthy or healthier, the first things people think about is, "Oh my God, it's not going to taste like anything. I might as well eat some tree bark and chew on some grass or something. Excuse me. The premise of even in my book, *Eating Well to Win*, the premise of it was to eat a little healthier, but to be able to still keep the flavor. And I think that is something that is so important. Because first you eat with your eyes, so it needs to be something that looks good. And then you don't want to get into it, and it doesn't taste like anything, which is that would be a horrible surprise.

Laurie

The worst.

Richard Ingraham

The worst ever. So you need to make sure that you have great flavor in the food. And you can do that, even with watching your sodium content. Instead of using so much salt, you may use more citrus, you may use more fresh herbs and other spices and things like that to bring out the flavor in your food. So it's just so many different things that you can do to eat healthier and to still have the flavor that you're looking for.

Laurie

Do you feel like it's really just making tiny little changes here and there that can sort of keep something on the fresher side?

Richard Ingraham

When you say on the fresher side, do you mean as far as like fresh ideas or what? Like that?

Laurie

Yeah. Ideas or even just-

Richard Ingraham

It's just little things.

Laurie

Yeah. And changing one ingredient here and there could make something a little healthier.

Richard Ingraham

Oh, most definitely. Instead of using white flour, you can use your gluten-free flour, you can use almond meal to make pancakes sometimes instead of... And even if you do use your white flour, if you don't want to give that up, start putting in a little flaxseed into the mix. Put in a little chia seeds into the mix. You can add walnuts into the mix. So many different little things that you can add to give your body a healthier boost. If you're making meatballs instead of just doing a regular meatball, use turkey. And if you use turkey, then why don't you add a little spinach in there, a little ginger in there, a little garlic in there.

Richard Ingraham

You put all of that together, you make a nice little curry sauce. Now you got turkey and spinach meatballs with curry. You got ginger, which is great for your gut. You have garlic in there which is great for your immune system. You have your spinach in there that has vitamin A in there. It has the chlorophyll in it that helps the blood flow through your body. You have the turkey which is better for you than beef. And it's lean protein, so now you don't have all of the fat that you're dealing with. So boom, there you go.

Laurie

Yeah. I love that. And it sounds like chef, it's not always about taking out something, sometimes it's about adding something, like you're talking about the ginger.

Richard Ingraham

That's right. Sometimes it's about putting it in. When you put it in sometimes, you come out with some great results.

Laurie

Chef, I could talk to you forever but I feel like for me the thing that I'm taking away from this is just these tiny little changes that you sound like you're doing in your organization, in the way you're cooking, in the way you're setting up your kitchen. All these things are so inspiring to me, and at the beginning of the year, I feel like these are all little things that a home cook could really start to incorporate in their own process.

Richard Ingraham

Yes, yes. Excuse me. The same philosophy for cooking in a restaurant, the same philosophy for being a personal chef should be the same philosophy for a home cook. The only difference is in the restaurant you're cooking for hundreds of people at a time. And the difference between being a personal chef is that you may not be cooking for hundreds of people, but you have to have your head on the swivel at all times, because you cannot cook the same thing twice, and things of that nature. But the common denominator with all of us is that organization is key. Organization is key. You have to make your surroundings one that's conducive for you to be as creative as you can possibly be.

Richard Ingraham

Now, in the restaurant business, some chefs like a quiet kitchen, some chefs like a kitchen that's busy. Those are the things that they could work in the best. For me, I like to play my music, so I play music while I cook. And even though I have people zipping in and out of the kitchen, if they get too loud, I'll

take my ear pods and put one ear pod in so that I can listen to my music and I can groove while I'm cooking. But I'm organized as well. The same thing for the home cook. Find something that you enjoy doing.

Richard Ingraham

Now, if you like watching television, hey, put your television on and watch television while you cook. If you like talking, talk to your family while you cook. If you like listening to music like me, whenever I get ready to start cooking, and my family they hear that music going, they're like, "Oh boy. It's about to go down. He's kind of doing something." You know what I mean?

Laurie

Yes. I love it.

Richard Ingraham

Yeah, yeah. So you got to make your surroundings comfortable for you.

Laurie

Yeah. Take care of the organization, set up the systems right, and then set it free and enjoy yourself while you're in the kitchen.

Richard Ingraham

And enjoy yourself while you're in the kitchen.

Laurie

Yeah. I got one last question for you, chef. Is there a cheat meal on the Gab and Dwayne? Like, do they have a cheat... Are you running to in and out at some point for them? Is there a cheat meal that we should know about? What do you got?

Richard Ingraham

Well, whatever it is that they like, I'd make it. Dwayne loves chocolate chip cookies, so I make sure on Friday, I fill up the Wade cookie jar with chocolate chip cookies, so that he can have those. Gabby being gluten and dairy-free, every once in a while she loves a good cobbler. She loves cook fruit, so when it was peach season, I did a peach cobbler with blueberries, and I did like this oatmeal crust over the top oatmeal streusel. So little things like that. Every once in a while somebody might like a good steak, or one of my real cheesy lasagnas, or a burger or something like that. But I give it to them. They try their best not to indulge too much.

Richard Ingraham

And if I see that they're getting a little out of order, I kind of try to cut them back myself. Because what will happen is it falls on me at the end of the day. Because if they gained weight, or they're not looking the way that they want to look for a photo shoot or something, now I have to work even harder to get that weight off of them. So I have to kind of... Even though it's great for me when they want to splurge, because I can just get as creative as I want to be and it's so fun, but I have to be able to reel myself in as well and remember that, "Hey, listen. You put those pounds on, you're going to be responsible for taking them off." And it's harder to take them off than to put them on. Believe me.

Laurie

Wow. Chef, I wish I was waking up finding you in my kitchen every morning. Thank you so much for hanging out with us. I can't think of a better way to kick off the year.

Richard Ingraham

Oh, it's such a pleasure.

Laurie

Oh my gosh, you're amazing.

Laurie

And thank you to all our listeners, it's been great seeing so many NEW friends joining us! Chef Vivian Howard will be with us on the next episode, and you do NOT want to miss her unique approach to meal prep.

Vivian Howard

Well, I believe in meal prep, I just think we're doing it wrong.

Laurie

If you enjoyed listening to this, please, please share us with a friend. And subscribe to Heart to Table! For more information on everything you've heard here, plus recipes, head to [HormelFoods.com/hearttable](https://www.hormelfoods.com/hearttable).