

Yes, Romney is Rich. Is that a Bad Thing?

☒ Imagine that your husband, wife, or child was in a terrible car accident. Imagine you were told by physicians that a complicated surgery was the best option to save their life and assure a successful recovery. Imagine that a skilled surgeon was readily available to perform the surgery. What would you think if a hospital administrator then sat you down and explained that there was something about the surgeon you should know... something that might influence your decision to let him operate. That crucial piece of information: The surgeon is **extremely wealthy**.

How would you react? Would you stew over the image of that surgeon owning fancy cars and homes that you'll never own, and decide against letting him perform the procedure? My guess would be no. My guess would be that the surgeon's personal wealth wouldn't give you a single reservation about letting him save your loved one's life. You might even consider that doctor's wealth to be an assuring indication that he's highly experienced and extremely good at what he does.

Does it make any sense at all to discount a successful individual's expertise because they live an affluent lifestyle and may not know what it's like to be poor? Such things might matter to people if they're choosing a friend or a mate, but a surgeon? I think not.

Equating quality with financial success obviously isn't something exclusive to the medical profession. We see it everywhere. There's a reason Robert DeNiro is far more wealthy than the guy doing a shampoo commercial. There's a reason Stephen King is far more wealthy than the struggling writers who can't get their work published. There's a reason Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are far more wealthy than the guys

working at the Best Buy *Geek Squad* counter.

These people are exceptionally good at what they do. They're major achievers. They're major winners. And most people have no qualms in recognizing them as such while accepting that personal wealth is a byproduct of their accomplishments.

So why is it then, that while extraordinary wealth and success are legitimized under countless professions, they're met with discomfort and sometimes even disdain if you're a candidate running for the presidency – specifically a Republican candidate running for the presidency?

There are several reasons why I'm not a huge fan of Mitt Romney's, but his personal financial situation is certainly not one of them. In fact, I find it incredibly disturbing when I hear people leveling criticism at him for essentially being too wealthy. The rationale of course is that his lifestyle is so removed from that of most Americans' that he can't possibly empathize with their everyday challenges.

We've seen that sort of analysis a lot lately. Most recently, Romney took some media heat for telling an interviewer (while breaking down his personal income) that he gets speaker fees from time to time, "but not very much." Critics were quick to point out that he has earned close to \$400 thousand in speaking fees, so what Romney considers "not very much" equates to over seven times the average American household's annual income. Now, despite the fact that he was commenting on the amount in relation to his total earned income, and despite the fact that numerous high-profile politicians have made far more in speaking fees than Romney has, his statement was considered a gaffe that displayed insensitivity toward those of lesser means.

As hard as I try to understand why we should expect or prefer a candidate to be apologetic or dismissive about their wealth, I just can't understand the logic of it. Why should we look

down on the rewards of success?

After all, our country is teetering on economic insolvency. We're racking up trillions of dollars in debt that our children and grandchildren can't possibly pay off. Half of the households in America are receiving government assistance and there aren't enough wealth-creators to support them. The very least of my concerns is whether or not my president has experienced the constraints of having to cut coupons from the Sunday paper to keep within a weekly grocery budget. The very least of my concerns is whether or not my president is sensitive to my feelings when it comes to expressing the luxuries he can personally afford. All I want is a competent president who sees the big picture and uses their acquired knowledge to fix the serious problems that are plaguing our nation. The fact that Romney is extremely accomplished in the business world is an asset, not a liability. It's certainly a far more effective argument for why he would make a good president than someone who may be able to relate to middle-income Americans on a personal level, but is missing the skill-set and drive to actually better those Americans' prospects.

As a country, we need to get passed this shallow notion that we should select a best friend rather than a leader. I don't need a surgeon, actor, author, or technology mogul to see *my life* through *my eyes*, or downplay their wealth to prevent me from feeling inferior. I want them to do what they do best so I can benefit from the expertise that made them rich. Why on earth wouldn't we want that same thing from our president?