

Balance365 Episode 202 Transcript

ANNIE BREES (INTRO)

Welcome to Balance365 Life Radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight, and wellness. I'm your host Annie Brees, along with co-founder Jennifer Campbell. Together we have a team of personal trainers and nutritionists who coach 1000s of women daily and are on a mission to help women feel happy, healthy, and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental, and emotional well-being with amazing guests. Enjoy.

ANNIE

Hello, friends, happy podcast day. Today we have a very special guest a good friend to Balance365 and trusted colleague, Chris McMahon. Chris is a nutrition and fitness coach who is passionate about men's health. He teaches and coaches skills and habits, not diets. And he doesn't shy away from having enriching conversations with men about emotional wellness, mental health, or body image. Chris is also anti-fad dieting, but not anti weight loss. Does he sound like anyone else you know? For years, we have been asked by our members if there are any programs like ours that they could send their male partners to. And this is it. My friends, we are thrilled to share with you today that Chris happens to be opening his men's only weight loss coaching program on January 17. You can get all the details, or on the waitlist for that program by clicking the link in our show notes. Enjoy.

ANNIE

Chris, welcome to the podcast. How are you?

CHRIS MCMAHON

I'm good. Thank you. Thank you very much for having me.

ANNIE

I'm so excited. You're such a joy to follow on social media. We were talking about that before we hit record, how great your content is.

CHRIS

Oh, wow. That means a lot. And yeah, it's such a weird thing. Social media, just trying to figure out what to put up, what not to put up, and at a certain point, not worrying anymore. Just doing it. You know?

JEN CAMPBELL

Yeah. You're actually well known in our community, and the women that we talk to also really appreciate your content. And it's just like adore you. [Laughs]

CHRIS

Well, that's nice to know.

JEN

[Laughs]

CHRIS

You know, sometimes someone follows me and I don't know who they are. And then I see, like, you're one of the people they follow or Balance365's one of the things they follow and it's like, "Oh, okay, great. Great."

JEN

Yeah yeah.

ANNIE

It's also really refreshing to find more men that share our same kind of, that we align with nutrition, fitness philosophies, similar values. That seems hard to come by.

CHRIS

Yeah, you know, sometimes I feel like an outlier. And then I'll chat with the both of you. And it's like, "Oh, yeah, you like the same people that I resonate with." You know, I really resonate with Josh, Josh Ellis. And, you know, when I was able to, like, work with him or talk with him, it just set off so many lightbulbs for me, that really uncovered a lot of things about myself, personally, in the health and fitness space that I was like, "Oh, yeah, this isn't right." The reason I feel so uncomfortable, and so burnt out is because I'm not actually talking about or doing what I'm actually meant to be doing. Like I'm not actually creating a space or holding a space for other people to feel their vulnerability to not be perfect, to not want to do the things that I'm doing, and know that it's still okay. It's still welcomed, it's still amazing that you're doing whatever you're doing, so long as you feel like it is checking off that box for you. Like, I'd rather, you know, I put a thing up, it was like, if you're running one day a week, it's good. If you're, if you're jogging two days a week, it's better, and if you're walking every day, that's like the best for me. That's where I am right now. That's me, someone who's done ultra-marathons and stuff, like I'd rather be walking every day. I don't need to, I don't need to prove that to anyone else or do anything like that anymore. You know?

JEN

Good, better, best is a philosophy that we use in Balance365. And it's it's very powerful and as it relates to nutrition choices. I often say to women like the only bad choice is not eating. Like good is good. Eat. Good, better, best.

ANNIE

Hang on before we get too far into like philosophies and approaches and values and all that stuff, I want to hear more about -

JEN

Walk it back, walk it back.

ANNIE

- Chris. What do we need to know? What do you want us to know about you? Like how did you get to where you are today, in the way that you're working,

CHRIS

Yeah, oh, I'm an open book, so I can share everything, anything under the sun. For me, I grew up a kid who was not really athletic, I kind of disliked doing anything physical, I'd rather play video games, read books, be by myself. And then I grew up in a way where I was bullied, I was bullied a bit. And as an adult, I can now recognize, "Oh, they weren't...They weren't laughing with me. They were laughing at me." I grew up doing theater, I grew up doing musicals, I went to school for music and performance, and even though I did play sports, I was very fortunate that I was friends with a lot of the jocks, I just happened to be friends with them. And it would be really sad that the kids who were like two years younger than me, were picking on me and I'd have to go tell my friend who was like on the football team, and he would have to go deal with them. It was like, I was always really lanky, really skinny, and bullied for it. And that influenced me like a bit in my choices, how I carried myself, in how I would be very outspoken and very loud, and very much a clown and make jokes. So no one else could beat me to it. Like, that was kind of the thing I developed. And then I was in college, and I got cast in a role where they were like, "You're gonna play like this super-tough prisoner. If you don't go start working out, we're gonna recast it," which made me go, "Oh, okay." I've never been...I went to the gym once. And the person I went with knew what they were doing. I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't put my arms down at my side for a week. My roommate my freshman year, who I didn't know, he was a new roommate, never met him. I remember waking up in the morning being like, "Hey, man, you have to, you have to change me, I can't get my shirt off." And he was like, "Alright, it's college." [Laughs] Like that was that was really my foray. And that's why I had this funny taste around fitness. I was like, "Oh, it means hurting all the time. Like, I'm not gonna do this, but I really want to act." So I called my friend who was still, he's my best friend to this day. We went to high school together and everything. He was going to school for kinesiology and personal training. And I was like, "Look, I need to put on some muscle and I need to work out. I don't know what I'm doing. Can you help me?" He's like, "Sure, show up at my house tomorrow at 2pm. I've never trained anyone before, but I should probably start practicing. I'm not going to charge you anything. Just come." And that summer, we worked out together every single day. I like to believe that I come with a beginner mindset to whatever I'm doing, even if I've done it before. So I just asked questions. I just did what I was told. And by the end of that summer, I had put on about 45 pounds from -

JEN

Whoa.

ANNIE

I'm sorry, what?

JEN

[Laughs]

CHRIS

Yeah, I went from being 119 pounds my freshman year of college to about 150, 155 pounds.

ANNIE

You had to have been really intentional with your nutrition as well.

CHRIS

Yeah, by intentionally you mean just eating everything in sight? Yeah, that's what I did.

ANNIE

That is an intention. [Laughs]

CHRIS

[Laughs] Yeah. I think I was also a very late bloomer, like I didn't have to shave until I was probably like 18, 19. Closer to 20. I was just a late bloomer. And it was kind of like a perfect storm of everything where I was working out, I was suddenly eating like 4 or 5000 calories a day, I was working out like twice a day, like I was doing all this hard work to get ready for this thing. My mind was just focused on the role I was playing, I wasn't focused at all on like, how truly hard and uncomfortable it was and how much I didn't want to go do that. And then I went to school, and suddenly I was getting attention from boys and girls. From everyone around me in the theatre department. And I had this level of confidence, suddenly, that wasn't there. And that's what kept me in it. So from 19 until now, fitness has always been a part of my life. And by the time I graduated, that same friend was working at this big fancy corporate gym, and I was like, "Look, I don't want to wait tables. I want to have my own schedule. I want to do what I want." And I was talking to him. He's like, "Why don't you come in and interview for a trainer job?" And I was like, "I don't...I just graduated with a degree in theater. I don't know anything about fitness. Like I don't know anything. Why would they hire me?" He's like, "You're perfect. Just come in."

JEN

Oh my gosh. Does that say something about our industry.

CHRIS

Yeah.

JEN

I just have to say. [Laughs]

CHRIS

So. He was like, "Just come in. You'll interview and just tell them you don't know. You don't know. Just tell them exactly what, you know, be honest." And I was, and how lucky was I, that I interviewed at what they call a flagship location, it was the top education center for all of the gyms in the eastern seaboard. So it was this huge one because the gym I was working at had all these tiers, and they had the highest-ranked trainers there. So they would bring in, they would spend about \$25,000 on education alone, and bring in all these people. And again, I had a beginner's mindset. So I just, I went to every class, listened. I'm a pretty big nerd. So I just absorbed, I would make a lot of mistakes, I would ask a lot of questions and always be there. And within two years, I'd moved up to being one of like the top trainers there and was master instructor for a lot of different topics and traveling around and all of a sudden, my life just changed. It changed very quickly. But also the club culture, there was not the best. And it bred a lot of the things that I'm dealing with now, personally. Yeah, case in point, like, if you want clients, you had to wear really tight shirt. I was made to wear a woman's small shirt when I was working in their West Hollywood location, in order to get clients on the floor. And I would have to flirt, I would have to do all these things that demeaned me and made me feel less than and made me feel like a piece of meat and made me feel incredibly insecure. Incredibly insecure. And that's just how they operate. It is very unfortunate.

JEN

It sounds like you had an experience with getting bigger that might mirror a woman's experience getting smaller in some ways.

CHRIS

Yeah, I think, I think on some level, yes. Because I was always chasing that. I was never quite big enough for a long time. And then I kind of fell into this space of calisthenics and bodyweight training and doing all this stuff where it was suddenly like, "Oh, it's not how big you are, it's the cool trick you can do."

JEN

Right. So your value just shifted to a different area, but still looking for external -

CHRIS

External praise. Class.

JEN

Yeah.

CHRIS

Validation. And through many years of therapy and stuff. It's like, "Oh, yeah, it's just, you know, I wanted my father's approval. Okay. Let's try and find it somewhere else." [Laughs]

JEN

[Laughs] We all have certain therapy, always.

CHRIS

So it's like, it just shifted from one thing to another. It was very surface area, just scratching, scratching it, you know. But yeah, there were a lot of habits that were kind of formed along the way that a lot of people, I think, form and then kind of deal with over time, especially with clients I work with. So.

ANNIE

I want to circle back, Chris, you said something, that you were struggling then with a lot of the same things, you're struggling now, what did you mean by that?

CHRIS

Ah, yeah, so a lot of it was a lot of disordered eating habits, a lot of overtraining, a lot of my self worth being attached to how I looked, how I performed. I guess this is a story that I've told before, but it's just very, I was on the floor. And I will never forget this. Another one of my co workers, he had come back from a lunch break. And our gym was located below, in the basement of this building. And above us was a Whole Foods. So we would go to Whole Foods for lunch. And he came down and he had like a bag of what looked like delicious cookies, like delicious, chocolate chip, gooey, gooey, fresh, baked warm cookies. And he was walking across the gym floor. And I was working out at the time. And I was like, "Oh, what are those? What kind of cookies are those?" And he grabbed me by the arm and brought me into the locker room and he's like, "Never ask me what kind of cookies I have. Never, never, never do that on the gym floor. They can't know that I eat that. You shouldn't let them know that you're doing that. If you want them to make change. You should not do that. You need to use your head. You need to think about what you're doing. You need to think about how you're holding yourself." And I was 22 at the time. I just stood there and I was just like, shocked. And then in my mind I went, "Okay, no one can know that I do that because if I do that, then I'm not the best trainer. I'm not the best person. I'm not good enough. If other people know that I struggle with figuring out what to eat, I'm going to go paleo because I don't want to have to think about that. I don't want to have these, these stretch marks, I don't want to have those crease marks in my stomach anymore. I don't want to have that stuff. Because I guess that makes me an unhealthy trainer. I guess that makes me not that. Why would someone want to work with me? Why would, why would my partner be attracted to..." Like it slowly, like that stuff over time accumulated. And it wasn't until like, maybe working with Josh maybe, you know, having conversations with him and stuff that I was able to realize about myself. He's like, "Oh, there's a lot of disordered stuff going on there." Like I can tell like, it's really hard to be a health professional if we can, if I call myself that, it just, it's really hard to work with other people and recognize that, oh yeah, there's still a lot in there. Still a lot, like you've eliminated food groups, you've done double sessions, you've beaten yourself up, if you've skipped sessions and gone down the rabbit hole of feeling like you're not doing enough today. You're not enough. What are you going to do to be enough? When's it gonna be enough? So that's the stuff that, you know, I still work on.

ANNIE

Yeah, I'm not surprised to hear that. But it's unfortunate for sure. Do you think Chris, your experience the messages that you have received, were receiving, maybe still see present in our culture...Do you think men struggle with that?

CHRIS

1,000%. I think the idea of what it is to be masculine and to be strong, is to ignore all of that, is to bury it deeper, is to either just not do anything at all. And just sit and feel. Maybe you feel disgusted with yourself, maybe you feel rundown, but just let that be and then make yourself a joke. Make a joke of yourself, you know, have that be the route you take, or you get super super into it, and you only eat clean. And you do the latest trends. And you biohack your way in, right? There's no middle. Literally in the male culture, it's all or nothing at all times. There's no in-between, because that's what's shown. I was talking with a client and we were, I was talking about...Well, it's either you're Steve Rogers at the beginning of Captain America, where you're really small and scrawny. And you're a good person, but that's overlooked by everyone. Or you're Captain America, who's really, really big and buff and strong, and is wanted by everyone. What's missed is the journey, or the hero's journey in between, which is that they're the same person. They're the same person. And it's really, really sad that it took him to become a superhero, to get any recognition from anyone else. Because that sets an unrealistic expectation or standard for everyone else. Well, I could do bicep curls till the cows come home, I'm not going to fill out a Captain America costume.

JEN

[Laughs]

CHRIS

Like, I'm just not.

JEN

I feel this having three sons. And you know, we live in superhero infused world right now. You know, Marvel movies, all of that, my boys are obsessed with superheroes. And I really, I really feel that when you say that, and it's causing me to kind of pause and go, "I wonder what they are learning to value here." And if we're having enough conversations with them, enough well-rounded conversations with them to balance that out because honestly, I could do bicep curls all day too. And I'm never going to have Annie's biceps. And my one son in particular, absolutely has inherited my genetic disposition, long and lean. And so yeah, you're just kind of showing me, "Huh. Well, there's something here."

CHRIS

Yeah. And I think it extends even far beyond that. I mean, what Jen, when you and I were talking the other day, I brought this up. Like, I grew up playing baseball. I played because I was good at it. I could, if I actually applied the same love and passion I had for music to it, I probably would have been really good at it because I would have enjoyed it. But when I told my dad that I wanted to stop playing baseball because I wanted to do the musicals and go to school for music. And his first question wasn't like, "Oh, what made you choose that." He literally asked me

if I was gay. I was 13. I was just, I just became a teenager. And here I am already confused as it is with all the feelings and the hormone monsters going through my body. And it's like, "Whoa, whoa, yeah. Wait, what? Am I? No, I'm not. I just, if anything, I get to be around beautiful women all the time." So why is that even a -

JEN

In theater. [Laughs]

CHRIS

And I'm one of like two straight guys in the entire, or men who identify that way...Why does it matter? Like why does that even matter? Why is that even a thing? Shouldn't it be, you're proud of me for recognizing that I have a passion for something and I want to try it? Regardless. You know, that's why it's kind of like the same thing with fitness. It's like, oh, at least you're trying, regardless of what avenue you're seeing, regardless of, if you enter with some disordered or warped view of it. It's like, at least you have an entry point. And you'll be able to go back and look at it and say, "Oh, well, I learned something from that, like, oh, well, I'm a work in progress." Like that's the difference. That's the difference when it comes to that.

ANNIE

It sounds like in very much a similar way, we've talked about many, many times, the cultural ideals and like what's acceptable for women. That's not to say that men don't experience a lot of that, too. It's just we aren't experts, because we have a lived experience as women, but you are sharing that they have a very, you experienced a very narrow view of what was acceptable. I'm always worshipped or valued or praised as well for men.

CHRIS

Yes, very much so. I could just remember this from even a super young age. Very emotional, very open, in touch, I guess in touch with my emotions from a young age. I remember a girl I had a crush on said something mean about me or something, I was like in seven, maybe like fifth or sixth grade. And I told my friend, and he was like, "Alright." And then I just, I remember welling up with tears, and having to rush into the bathroom, because the bathroom was in the classroom, because it's middle school. And I remember just staying in there for what felt like an hour, it was probably like five minutes, crying, and coming out. And the guy who was supposed to be my best friend was making fun of me with all the other guys. He knew that I felt that way. But it's not his fault. Because that's how it's kind of put out there. It's like the guy who's in touch with how he actually feels, and can be vulnerable and can say what he's feeling and can actually take up space in the room with that, is viewed as almost like a threat. So why not push down the thing, because if he feels that way, and it's accepted, then that means I have to actually encounter what I'm feeling, I have to actually recognize that I am human, I have to have all those things. That scary. And what I talk about is for masculinity or for male, however you choose to identify, the thing that's missing is your ability to be humane, your ability to have humility, your ability to have an understanding that you're not the only person who feels this way, your ability to meditate with the thoughts or feelings. You have your ability to navigate those emotions as they arise and your ability to experience those emotions as they arise. That's

what's missing. Your ability to be humane with yourself, which leads directly into self-compassion with yourself, which leads into vulnerability, which leads into any form of growth. You literally cut yourself off there. You can't have any of it.

ANNIE

You doing okay, Jen? [Laughs] Get her a tissue.

JEN

[Laughs]

CHRIS

[Laughs]

JEN

That was so beautiful, Chris. And what kept coming up for me as I was listening to you is hurt people hurt people.

CHRIS

Oh, yeah.

JEN

And it sounds like you, you know, the experience of the trainer, even this little boy like it's like, if that's not an example of how hurt people hurt people. It's just, and then the cycle perpetuates, which, it's amazing to see somebody who's kind of stood up and said, like, "Hey, I'm not going to do that."

ANNIE

Chris, would you say what you just described, this lack of vulnerability and compassion, is one of the things that keep men struggling from making lasting, meaningful change?

CHRIS

Yeah, because when you meet something that's really really hard, you're used to pushing harder against it. But if we treat our emotions that way, you don't get anywhere. You know, there's a great example from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. It's the bus, it's the bus scenario. The bus scenario, you ride the bus. You drive the bus, you're the bus driver at all times, people get on and off the bus. When they get on and off the bus, these people are your thoughts, your ideas, your past stories, some of them are going to be good, some of them are going to be bad. But if we remove good or bad from it, they're just experiences. Now there are going to be different points in your life. For me, case in point, wanting to go work out or wanting to start to move my body, that was a different experience for me. The other voices that pop up in the back of my head influence, or force me to turn the bus around, or I try to keep them in the back of the bus by doing harder sessions, by taking up something like kickboxing, by doing something more physical, to try to keep pushing those things back. But eventually, they spill to the front of the bus and you have to turn the bus around, which leads you to be stuck in the same direction at

all times. Now what accepting and what actual vulnerability allows you to have, is that you can drive the bus and you remember that you're the bus driver. And you can acknowledge the feelings that pop up, acknowledge the people in the back of the bus and be like, "Hey, thank you so much for reminding me of what's actually important. Thank you so much for reminding me that my job is actually to get to the endpoint, get to the destination. So that means I'm going to have to take a different route right now. And that's okay. It's going to be confusing together. But you know what? I promise you, you'll still be able to get off at the next stop. Like I promise you." And it's this, this hard thing to be able to actually do. It requires you to mess up a lot, but also requires you to be okay with that and learn from it.

JEN

Chris, can you walk us through, like, a real granular example of how that might play out? A more typical example.

CHRIS

Yeah. Okay. So let's see, if we use an example of, I'll use a real example. Okay. So if, for me, when I recognized that I had to go to therapy, and get help, it's because I was having a series of panic attacks, a large series, if you don't have panic attacks, we can sub it in for anything else. It could be binge eating, it could be, it could be any sort of emotional dysregulation that requires us to attach to some sort of regulation or coping mechanism that we have. For me, I tried everything. I would go for three-hour walks, I would sit in meditation, I would work out twice a day, I was eating really clean and really healthy. I was reading all the self-help books, I was doing all of these things in an effort to push back the feelings that I was having of being depressed or feeling less than. Feeling not enough. So no matter what I did, I pushed it down, to try to avoid having to ask for help, trying to avoid having to go and sit in a room and talk with someone about how I'm actually feeling. And what happened. This is a more extreme example, is my wife came home and found me crumpled on the floor. And I hadn't, I hadn't moved in over two hours, I had a panic attack. And it was one of many panic attacks. But it was to the point where I could not move. And the decision was kind of made for me that I had to go to therapy, that I had to start talking about my past trauma, things that happened far beyond that, that I had blocked out stuff that I wasn't even aware of that was me turning down a different path. It kind of was decided for me. Sometimes we get to those points and we don't have people in our corner who can point us in a different direction. That's when we turn back to, "Okay, I'm going to, I'm going to binge eat right now. Okay, I'm going to go, I'm going to go drink right now. Okay, I'm going to go to X or Y right now," because we use those things to try to distract the passengers on the bus. But eventually, they figure out your tricks. And eventually, something's gonna come. Something's gonna stop the bus. And that's when we feel stuck. That's when we feel trapped. That's when we either bury it deeper and keep going with the same habits over and over again. Or we choose to try something a little different. I think the thing that trips people up is if they say they're going to try something different. They try to go really extreme. They try to do too much.

JEN

Yeah, it's, they go further and further, and maybe I can control this more and maybe I need more rules and maybe I need to be more extreme. Do you think that, based on kind of this culture of

masculinity, and you know, the different things that you experienced, do you think men are more likely to like, almost need to hit rock bottom before they say they need help than maybe a woman would be?

CHRIS

Unfortunately, yes, you have to have, you know, in AA, it's called the Come to Jesus moment, you have to have that moment. I think that whatever you practice, whatever you believe, there has to be some massive moment that causes some sort of shift. Right? I think the thing is, is that, like I said, sometimes we think it has to be an all or nothing. That's why I really, really encourage clients to go really, really small, like, ridiculously small, like, where it feels like it's stupid if I don't do this, right? Because what you're doing is actually your healing, your intuition, your healing, that little voice in the back of your mind, that tells you, "Oh, I might not want to do this, I might...You probably shouldn't do that," that we've ignored for so long. So if I make a really, really small promise to try, and I follow through on that promise, you're more likely to try again.

JEN

Yeah, you're building trust back up with yourself.

CHRIS

Right? You're building that trust. So it's a small daily promise, and you can make it whatever you want it to be. I like to put in there that I'll try. I'll just try. And if it works, it works. If it doesn't work, it's not a sign that I'm wrong, or I'm flawed. It's a sign that maybe it was a little too advanced what I was trying right now, maybe I can shave it back and find another layer that I can actually stick with. Maybe going for a walk every day is too much. Maybe it's just stepping outside and feeling the sun on my face. And letting that be how I take my lunch break or how I start my lunch break that I'm more present, then I'm able to look down and see what I'm eating, then I can practice more advanced skills like putting my fork down between bites, like engaging in conversation, right? So we need something that allows us to be like, "Okay, I can go really, really small, really, really small."

JEN

We want to ask, what are some of the beliefs that men struggle with that keep them from change? I know we really touched on all or nothing thinking. What else would you say?

CHRIS

That they can't do it. No belief, no proof, feeling like they have no support system, even if you have a family, even if you have friends. Feeling alone in what you're actually going through. That lack of community, even if you have community, because usually the other men in the community who are feeling this way or thinking this way, aren't saying it either.

JEN

Right.

CHRIS

You know, I really, I have one really, really close guy friend. I'm on the - I'll be friends with anyone. I'll ask someone if they want to be my friend. I just have this, he's been my friend. He's the same guy who was my trainer when I first started, he was best man at my wedding, is godfather to my son. We openly tell each other that we love each other. And we sign off phone calls or text messages with I love you. You know? But right now his mother isn't doing well. So we've talked like every day. He knows what I'm going through or what I'm feeling. That is what we need. But that requires you to be vulnerable and say it.

JEN

Right. So this vulnerabilities situation is a big deal, you're saying.

CHRIS

Super big. Yeah. And it's missing every part of that word humane, like that is what's missing. It's having an understanding that you're not alone in your thoughts or feelings and being able to accept them. And also, the thing that stops you from change is the conversation that says, "Oh, I'll make the change. But I'm probably going to backslide."

JEN

Yeah.

CHRIS

"I'm probably going to go back. I watched" - or better yet, "I watched so and so do it. They did it. They did it really fast. I should be able to do it like them." So it's excessive expectation. It's stories that you've told yourself that you are fused with. It is avoiding your values, avoiding what's actually important to you. You know, I talk about it a lot with clients. My definition of strength is different than your definition of strength. My definition for strength used to be being able to deadlift like three times my body weight. Now it is stepping into the gym, feeling how I actually feel and saying, "You know what? I don't need this today. I need to go outside," or, "You know what? One set. The warm up is more than enough. Let me go be with my son. Let me go talk to my wife. Let me go sit in meditation. Let me go...Let me go read a book, let me go." Strength is the ability to meet yourself where you're at, what you guys are all about. That's true strength, in my opinion. That's how I choose to identify that value. For me strength is a value, balance is a value. Being adventurous is a value, and family, those are like, for my four values in whatever area of my life. And sometimes when something's out of whack, it's because I'm usually not in alignment with those things.

JEN

For sure.

CHRIS

And that's like, the biggest thing is like not being aware of those things, of literally avoiding your values, and not being aware of what they are in the first place.

JEN

Yeah, totally the anchorless. So I'm hearing you say, developing the, I guess, skill, awareness and intention to ask yourself what you need every day, like, what do you really need?

CHRIS

Yeah, yeah. And, you know, the way I, the way I say it is like, we have wants and we have needs. And if we ignore, if we ignore what we actually need, we're not going to get any closer to what we want. And if we ignore what we actually want, we're never going to know what we need. And that's kind of scary for people, especially men, because it might mean, oh, yeah, I'm doing something I actually don't want to be doing for the rest of my life. That's really scary.

JEN

Mm-hmm.

ANNIE

What you are saying, Chris, are things that we've seen in women as well. Is there any, and as a human who works, coaches, both men, and women, do you see any differences in mistakes, beliefs, approaches?

CHRIS

Yeah, I think a woman is more likely, a woman is more likely to forgive herself more easily. And to be open to the things I'm actually saying. A man, we have to start off first talking about like a deadlift. And the way I get men to actually become more present or to be aware, is to say, "Okay, what is happening in your body while you're deadlifting?" - "Well, I'm doing..." - and I say, "Okay, what are you actually focused on?" - "Well, just getting to the next set." - "No, no, no. What are you focusing on?" - "I don't know." - "Okay, well, if you put the weight in the midfoot, and you sit your hips back, and you pull your lats down, focus on that." - "Okay, I'm focusing on that. Oh, you know what, I actually noticed that something was off while I was deadlifting and I decided to drop the weight down." - "Cool. Do you know what you're practicing?" - "What?" - "Presence." - "Oh." - "Yeah. Let's try that during your next meal. Do you think you can be present during your next meal?" - "I don't know." - "Okay, cool. Here's what you're going to try. Chew the food, see how it actually tastes. And then write down in your notes or whatever, how you actually felt when you tasted that food." - "Hey, Chris. I actually found you know, I really don't like, I don't really like quinoa. I don't like that. Do I have to eat it?" - "No, you don't have to eat it."

JEN

[Laughs]

CHRIS

"It's a disgusting texture. I don't know who told you that to eat it. I didn't sit here and say you had to eat it. It doesn't make you healthier if you eat it. Eat some french fries. But actually enjoy what you're eating and recognize how you're feeling." - "Okay. Hey, Chris, I noticed that like, I noticed that I'm feeling." - "What did you say? Are you in therapy right now? No, you're not, you're just

embracing your humanity and saying I noticed that I'm feeling." But we have to meet the person where they're at. And with men, it's more likely to be some physical attribute. Something that they're working towards.

JEN

Yeah, that's genius, Chris, that is genius. I love that you do that. And I think you are going to teach a lot of men a lot of things through that path. That's amazing.

ANNIE

That would have worked on me as well, just to be clear.

CHRIS

[Laughs]

ANNIE

[Laughs]

JEN

I was thinking that, Annie.

ANNIE

As a woman who also values the deadlift, and how much is on the deadlift bar and avoids her emotions. Well, used to. That approach would have worked well on me, too, Chris.

JEN

It's also showing like the transferable skill, right? Because I guess what we see in coaching, in our program, Chris, is that people can learn skills, exactly what you said in certain contexts, and then they like panic when they're in a different context and getting them to see that it's a transferable skill. You did that here and there. It might be different challenges for you in this other context. But let's give it a shot. Right? It's still the same skill.

CHRIS

Yeah. Yeah, and that's, that's a little more attractive for most men, because most men want to do less, right? They want to do less, even though they're forcing themselves to do more. What they actually internally want is to do the least amount possible. But they're afraid to say that, or they demonstrate, they go to the extreme where they do absolutely nothing at all. So it's like, it's toeing the line, and tapping into that a little bit.

JEN

So one big question that we want to ask you. And it's honestly the reason we invited you on. So, you know, for years and years and years, Annie and I have been asked by our members who have male partners, or male-identifying partners, like how to help their partners. And I mean, honestly, before meeting you, we didn't have a ton of places to send them. And what our members are wondering is, how can they, is there conversations they can have? Or is there a

way that they can support their partners in finding what they found in Balance365, right? Skills, habits, you know, honest conversations about body image and pressure and emotional wellness. Is there, do you have any advice around that, on how to, or if they should get those conversations going? Or how, or if they can support their partners to move towards positive behavioral change?

CHRIS

Oh, I love this question. It's such a good question. So I'll give you one example, which could be one scenario. I had a client and she was retired. And her big goal was to be able to enjoy retirement with her husband, and travel. That's all they wanted to do. And then the pandemic happened. So they couldn't travel, they couldn't do anything. So she decided that she wanted to start losing some weight and moving her body, things she really hadn't done before. And the thing that she did was she told her husband what she wanted to do, she was really clear, she was really crystal clear. She said, "I want to lose weight, so that we can go on a big hike, like, I want to go to Hawaii and go on a big hike. That's what I want to do. And I want you to come with me." And the husband was like, "That sounds great." And then she started a workout and asked him if he wanted to, like, just be in the same room with her while she worked out. That's how it started out. Just be in the same room with me. So she would do her workouts in the living room while he would read the newspaper. And then slowly, but surely, he would make his way down into the basement. And he would go on the elliptical while she was working out and watching. They would watch MSNBC like on the screen. So they would watch something together. Then it turned into a ritual where they would, she would say some of the things that she's working on, some of the habits that we were working on together. So like one of the habits is like balancing a plate, which I know you guys do. And another habit was putting a fork down in between bites. Another habit was no screens. So like they started to do that stuff together. And they started to recognize that they enjoy doing those things together. But at no point did she say, "Hey, I need you to do this." What it said was, "Hey, I'm trying this, you want to...It's pretty warm. It's pretty welcoming."

JEN

Like. "Come along," instead of...Yes.

CHRIS

It's not, "Do this." It's, "Look at this." And then what happened is by the time we finished working together, they'd both lost like 15, 20 pounds. And they still have the same routine together. They wake up every morning, they eat breakfast together, and they go do their little routine. And yeah, they've been on their hike, they've done that. So that's one option if your partner is really, really open or observant. Another option is to be, "Hey, this is the thing I'm trying," and you go to like the smallest thing you're trying. Case in point if you're doing, if it's a sleep thing, which I know you guys work on, like one of the sleep habits, one of the sleep routines that you do. Some of the things I have clients do is like they'll do like two stretches before bed. Like they pick a stretch or they will do a journal. Like they'll write one thing they're grateful for before bed, things like that. I'll say, "Hey, why don't you...Why don't you ask your partner if they want to just do one stretch with you?" My wife and I, we don't get to see each other a lot because she works

crazy hours as a teacher and as a choreographer, and I work different hours because I'm with our son or I'm coaching. So what we'll do, or what we used to really do a lot, is we would call it a stretch party or a foam roller party. And we would just, we would just put on whatever was on Netflix, usually it would be like, for my wife, it would be the Bachelor or it would be Real Housewives of wherever. And that would be on in the background. And we would talk, that's all it was. What we didn't realize is, oh it's actually relaxing us, It was actually downregulating our system, it actually allowed us to co-regulate, which increases your relationship, increases your bond, right? All these things. I had no idea we were doing that. I just thought we were, I really wanted to stretch and she really wanted to have a conversation. So now it's the thing that we do, right? So same thing applies here. It's like, what is one habit or one really small thing that you take away from Balance365 that you feel comfortable sharing, you feel confident sharing, not something you're on the fence about, something you are comfortable with explaining. If you could explain it to like your four or five-year-old, then that's probably a great time to actually share it with your partner. Because they're going to have questions. They're going to be curious. And I highly encourage people to be curious. Because that's when you're going to do something great. Because that's when you're going to be open to making mistakes, because you're curious, and you can recognize you're new to something. So that's, I think that's a great way to go about it.

ANNIE

Okay, I have to play devil's advocate, though here. What if they say no?

CHRIS

It's okay.

ANNIE

Over and over and over again?

CHRIS

They're not ready for it.

ANNIE

Would you recommend continuing to extend the invitation? Or?

CHRIS

I think, personally, for me, I wouldn't continue to extend the invitation. Because if anything, it's starting to sour or ruin your experience with your journey. Everyone's on their own journey, what I think is really important is that you're being supported. Case in point for me, I'm sober. My wife knows this. She'll ask me, if she's gonna have wine or something, she just does it. She asks, "Is it okay if I do this right now?" And my answer is always yes. One because I don't like wine, two, because I'm where I am in my journey. I'm okay with it. It's the same thing. "Hey, I'm going to do this right now. Is that cool with you?" Totally. If you get that, then you're opening a dialogue, as opposed to saying, "Hey, you should really do this, you should do this, you should do this." That's what goes through my head.

JEN

I mean, we've got shoulds coming at us from every direction. Nobody likes being told what to do. And I also think there's like a level here, where men and women both have, you know, different body triggers. And so I remember a time when, if my husband, you know, suggested that I go for a workout, I immediately internalize that, as he didn't like something about me.

ANNIE

"You think I need to go for a workout? What are you saying?"

JEN

Absolutely. Especially during some sensitive times, like if I was just postpartum, and, you know, I don't think those things were crossing his mind. It was really about his health and everything. But in my own experience, I guess, these suggestions, "You should do this, you should do that." It's like, "Hey, what do you need to feel healthy?" Like asking someone, like if we have women listening, who have male-identifying partners. Let them decide what they need to be healthy. Right? And it might not be what you're doing. And the greatest truth in my life that has freed me so much is that you can't control other people. Period. You can't. And let it go. [Laughs]

CHRIS

Yeah. Yeah. And I think, in alignment with that, or from that same realm. It's like, that's why I was saying, go really small. Like, if you've been, if you've been working out every day, and you go for a walk or something, invite them.

JEN

Yeah.

CHRIS

More like, they're more likely to say yes to a walk than they are to your workout or even a stretch party. If you can make it so small that again, it's silly not to do it. There is still a good, there's a better chance that they'll say yes, or you can schedule it. That's the other thing. That's the other thing that changes it. If you can schedule it, and not surprise them with it, they're more likely to do it. At least that's how my mind works. Yeah.

JEN

Yeah, I think, too, just thinking, like the body image piece and kind of these deeper issues, it's like, I think what you've really described here, Chris, and that, you know, has even opened me up to, is that there's a lot of men out there struggling with some similar issues as women are, and when, you know, when we're on our partners about working out or eating better, or going for a walk, or whatever, like, there's a, there might be a lot there, right? That comes up for them, especially when their partner is the one suggesting it. And not that that's our intent, but there's just a lot, there's a lot there, there might be more there than we are allowing ourselves to, you know, think about and people truly do come, you know, in their own timeline, they come to this work.

CHRIS

Yeah. And, you know, it's kind of interesting, I was looking up some stats, and I might be off by percentage, but I think it's 20 to 25% of all - in the US, of the 30 million people struggling with disordered eating and eating disorders, 20 to 25% of them are male, or male identify. And that doesn't necessarily mean it's going to look the same for everyone. Right? So this is the thing. We might not, they might not know,

JEN

They might not know. Yeah. And to be told, you know, if you have binge eating issues, and you have a partner telling you, "We really should eat better," like, hello? Like that is ruminating in my head 24/7. This is not new information. So it can just feel, you know, it can feel like a real drain rather than what I think both partners intend, which is they intend to be supportive, but it ends up being draining. And one more thing that drains you and makes you not want to do the thing or move towards positive behavioral change.

CHRIS

Yeah.

JEN

So, Chris, how can men support one another? We talked a bit about community, if there's any men listening, who want to be part of, you know, a shift?. How can men support one another?

CHRIS

Oh, that's a really cool question. I think one is, is actually possibly saying how you're feeling to someone that you're really close with. And it doesn't have to be a sad thing. It can be open and honest. Like, I'm really happy right now. Or I'm in a really good place right now. Or actually asking a question and then not thinking of the next thing you're going to say. That is really refined skill, but it's listening. And it's connection, it's just calling someone or texting them or checking in on them, is a skill that I think a lot of men actually do struggle with. But if it comes from a place of, I'm in a good place right now, you're more likely to actually do it. You know, that is a way that you can support another man. The other thing is, the other thing, I think, for me, at least is giving space, like not trying to fix everything. Because we can't, you're not Superman, or Superwoman, or whoever super that you want to identify. I think it's giving space for someone, you know, my wife shared something really, really cool the other day, it was from this person on Instagram, I think her name is "manifest destiny" or something like that. And she gives parents parenting advice or kids advice. But one of the things she said is that she had like a best friend growing up, and they would always do this thing, where what you would basically like, she called it bitching to each other. It was her bitchy bestie I think that's what she called it something like that. Again, I could be butchering that I'm very, very sorry. But the thing that they came up with this, when they were having these talks were, they would sometimes complain or sometimes be letting out their feelings. They started it off with, "I want this solved." Or, "I want this...I want to just like let it out."

JEN

Oh, Annie does this to me.

CHRIS

"I want this solved, or I want to..." Speak or spill or solve. Like I just want to spill right now and let this all out. Or do I want to solve? And if I say this, if I can, actually I'm practicing with my wife. We're doing it a lot more and it makes things way easier. But I also do it with my friends. Like I'll say like, "Hey, I just need to vent right now."

JEN

Yeah.

CHRIS

Or, "Hey, I don't want a solution to this. I just want to be able to tell you that like I feel I'm feeling pretty sh***ty. And here's why."

ANNIE

Jen and I just had that conversation yesterday, I went into solution mode, like, "This is how we're gonna fix this." And she's like, "I just want to throw a tantrum real quick. Like, just let me complain about this experience." And I was like, "Okay, all right. Yeah."

JEN

Well look, too, an understanding of that, though, is like when you're a coach, you almost innately go into coaching, you know, everyone, and I, when I'm talking to my husband, I have to hold myself back sometimes, like, I imagine it, that's how it might feel to be married to a therapist, or like, you know, you immediately, I just have this innate thing, I want to start coaching my husband, and there's a lot of times where I have to go, just, like he needs you to listen right now. Like, just button that.

CHRIS

Yeah, it's this...It's this weird thing, and I totally get that.

JEN

I was gonna say that Connor, when Connor Beaton was on our podcast, one thing he really tried to stress to us is that a lot of men, it's very common that a man or male-identifying person might have, whether it's conditioning or innate, I don't know what it is, but they want to fix it. They're fixers. They're fixers, and men want to fix things. And that's why they may have trouble just listening. And just being there.

CHRIS

Yeah, we want to provide, we want to make it all okay. And that's what makes it even more frustrating when we can't do it for ourselves, right? It's like, "Okay, all I want to do is fix stuff. Why can't I fix me?"

JEN
Right.

CHRIS

"Why? Why am I broken right now?" And the reality is, not all things can be fixed. And to be honest, you're not broken. And if you hear that, it's like, what do you mean? There's got to be something wrong. It's like, no, no, no, no. You're just having feelings. And that's okay. And for women, again, this is something I can say to women, and usually they're like, "Oh, thank goodness." Where guys, it's like, are you f***ing sure?" Like, sorry, I don't know if I can curse. "Are you sure? Are you sure I'm allowed to feel this? Are you sure I'm allowed to be happy and sad within like, five minutes? Are you sure that I'm allowed?" Right? And that's like, yeah. Ride that wave.

JEN

Yeah. So men can support other men by not going into fix it mode immediately. But just letting each other kind of sit in those feelings sometimes. And listen,

CHRIS

Yeah, those are like the two things that I think we could all use. Not to generalize, but I think most men could use is just that.

JEN

You hear that Annie?

ANNIE

I'm over here thinking like, "Gosh, I feel like... [laughs] I identify with, maybe emotionally was conditioned to be more masculine," I don't know. My mother was a PE teacher. My dad was an athletic director, like, this is just how I was brought up. So I identify a lot with what you're saying.

CHRIS

Sounds pretty bred. I was brought up by my mom. So that might be why I'm more apt to lean into my emotional side, too. My mom, you know, it's just a different, it's a different way, where if I was brought up, you know, I'm also an only child. So if I was brought up with a bunch of male siblings, and my dad, like, the nature at which I approach things would be completely different. I don't like roughhousing. I don't like any of that stuff. Where my friend, he had like three brothers. Every time I went over there, I wrestled. I didn't understand it. But like, apparently, it's, you know, it's a thing. But yeah, I don't know. There's also funky stuff in our brain. There's the male, masculine, there's the feminine, there's all this stuff. But yeah, basically, whatever you're doing -

JEN

We may never make sense of it all. [Laughs]

CHRIS

No, no, no.

JEN

We may just have to embrace who we are. And stop trying to make sense of it all.

CHRIS

I guess, I guess.

ANNIE

And regardless, I mean, the three of us are all very different personalities, and have very different experiences. But I think we're all collectively moving towards a similar place of like acceptance and self-compassion and what we need to get there might be different, but we're all striving towards that.

CHRIS

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's so true, Annie, I think that's very true. Everyone's journey is going to be different. Everything that works for someone is going to be different. If we talk about like, eating skills and stuff like that, like everyone's going to find one that works really well for them, and one that they absolutely despise, and they can't do.

JEN

Yeah, like I cannot put my fork down between bites. When I hear you and Josh talk about that, I'm like, "Give me a break." [Laughs]

CHRIS

I used to be able to do it and then this tiny human entered my life.

JEN

Thank you!

CHRIS

It doesn't work. It does not work.

JEN

It doesn't work.

CHRIS

But the caveat is like, "Oh, yeah, I know, I could just pick something else. Like I can, halfway through my meal, I could check-in and see what's going on here." But it's like, yeah, we can find the thing that works for us. that meshes for us that, you know, I have a client who like the five senses, checking in with their five senses while they eat, helps them really slow down. I have another client if they do that, they eat faster, because they like the taste. And they just focus on that. So it's like, okay, yeah, forks down between bites works for them better.

JEN

Yeah, totally. It's all about creating that toolbox. Right? And using the tool that works in each circumstance.

CHRIS

Yeah, whatever it is, it's just helping you be able to tap into your cues, your signals, what you actually need, what you actually want in that moment, you know, so that's really what it is. The internal work is what everyone needs.

JEN

I think that's all the questions we have today. Chris, you've been so generous with your time, is there...Where can people find you? And I also want to mention that your coaching program is opening up soon. And if there, I know you've got a men's only group coming up that you're opening, and where could our listeners find more information about that?

CHRIS

Yeah, so, I'm very present on Instagram. You can find me on there at @coach.chrismcmahon I'm just very friendly. So you could ask me whatever questions you have. But all the information is going to be posted there. And also, anyone who's on my email list, you get all the fun information and everything like that. So more than happy to give out my email address to anyone, maybe in the show notes, because it's long to spell out. But that's where all the information is going to be living for now. And yeah, I'm super excited.

JEN

Do you have a website, Chris?

CHRIS

Yes, it is www.chris-mcmahon.com

JEN

Right on, that's awesome.

ANNIE

And even if you're not a man listening to this or identify as a male, go follow him on Instagram. He's entertaining.

JEN

He's funny, informative. I just love following you.

ANNIE

And now that I know about your theater background, it makes sense, because I remember when I saw you singing, I was like, "He's kind of got a voice. Like -"

ALL

[Laugh]

ANNIE

"Who sings like that?" But now it makes sense to me.

CHRIS

Just sometimes just sometimes.

ANNIE

Yeah, I think it's great. I'm here for it all. This was so much fun, Chris. We'll have to have you back.

CHRIS

Oh, I would hope to be back. Thank you very much for having me.

ANNIE

Okay, we'll talk soon.

JEN

Thank you.

ANNIE (OUTRO)

Hey, everyone, if your mind has been blown while listening to this podcast, just wait until you work with us. Let us help you level up your health and wellness habits and your life inside Balance365 coaching. Head on over to balance365.co to join coaching