



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Coming home to our body for anxiety healing

Guest: Mark Walsh

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome, everyone, to this interview where I'm really excited to be talking with a good friend of mine, Mark Walsh.

Firstly, Mark, welcome and thank you for joining me.

Mark Walsh

Nice to see you again. It's always a pleasure.

Alex Howard

So we're going to be talking about anxiety from the perspective particularly of the body, and how often anxiety is stored and held, but also what's happening in our body also very much impacts what's happening in our minds and our emotions.

For those of you that don't know, Mark, to give a little bit of his background. Mark, sometimes known as Mr Embodiment, is the author of the book *Embodiment: Working With The Body in Training and Coaching*, and also the book *Embodied Meditation*.

He led the Embodiment Conference, which you wouldn't believe it unless you see it from behind the scenes, it was 1,000 teachers you had, right?

Mark Walsh

1,000 teachers and half a million attendees.

Alex Howard

I told you you were crazy before, during and after, and I stand by that.

Mark Walsh

We pulled it off somehow but there was some anxiety to it.

Alex Howard

Mark's also trained over 2,000 embodiment coaches in over 40 countries around the world.

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More recently, Mark founded The Sane Ukraine project, I think we'll get into that a little bit later in some different ways, which is really about training people on the ground in Ukraine in how to work with trauma.

His on the ground approach to self-regulation has become a mirror to the current zeitgeist and The Embodiment Unlimited Community, which he founded and grows, continues to grow rapidly through the newly launched Embodiment Portal.

I think, Mark, the place I'm starting a lot of these interviews as part of this conference is with what appears like quite a simple question, but actually there's many pieces to it, which is, from your perspective, what is anxiety?

If someone comes to you for one of your online programs or in-person training and says, "Mark, I feel anxious". What goes through your mind as you are making sense of that experience?

Mark Walsh

Fear, let's be honest. There's a simpler word for anxiety, and it's a more old fashioned word. And often the perspective I guess, is we're thinking about something bad that may or may not happen in the future. And that's very valid.

And this is the benefit of mindfulness, that we come back to the present moment. We're interrupting the thinking of something that may or may not happen. Most of the things I've got stressed about have never happened.

So just before this interview, we're talking about our lives. I could be remembering something from Ukraine, which was pretty stressful in a life or death way. I got back yesterday. Or more likely, thinking about my business and this, and my new flat, this will happen and that will happen. Most of those things never actually happen.

Like right now I'm quite warm, I've got a nice coffee, I'm talking to a friend of mine, some flowers I stole with my wife. Here it's all very pleasant. So there is something to be said for interrupting that thinking pattern, particularly anxious thinking, anxiety provoking thinking about the future, usually around things that may not happen and we can't control.

However, there's also a bodily reality. So my area tends to be the bodily side of things that tend to come at things that way. My teacher Paul Linden often says, "An emotion is an action done in the body". Not just a thought or something philosophical. Anxiety is a physiological state. Fear is a physiological state, and that may be caused by something present, caused by thinking. Or we could be stuck in that state, which is one of the ways I describe trauma.

So trauma is really a couple of things, but one of them would be being stuck in fight or flight. Flight fear, anxiety. And I had a pretty rough childhood and ended up in that state. I would wake up in that state, I'd wake up anxious. I didn't have anything to be anxious about. Some days I did, some days I didn't. But no matter how much I'd wake up in a beautiful environment with the sun shining or whatever, I'd still have that physiological charge in my body, and then have to go do my exercise or meditation or twelve step because I was self-medicating with alcohol.

[00:04:37]

In some ways you can think of addiction as an anxiety disorder as well. It's actually a solution to an anxiety disorder.

Alex Howard

An attempted solution.

Mark Walsh

It's not a perfect solution, certainly, but certainly one, as Gabor Mate talks about, kept you from being suicidal or a murderer, I'm sure.

If there's an anxious state in our body, we will attempt to do things about it. And those things may be wise or unwise, they may have different consequences. So I tend to think of anxiety as a bodily state.

Alex Howard

And I think what's important about what you're saying, and I was saying to you before we started recording that as part of the primary webinar that I did for the conference talking about mental, emotional and physical anxiety, that I think sometimes the danger is that people think, because I have this thing called anxiety, and that includes often thoughts of concern or fear or worry, that I need to resolve this by addressing it on the mental level.

And what I think is very important about what you're saying is that in many instances, actually to really address anxiety, we have to work with the body.

Mark Walsh

I mean, it's a bidirectional link. So we are holistic. We talk about body, mind, emotions or body, mind, emotions, spirit, they're all affecting each other.

And then the question becomes, where's the easiest access point? So if I drink too much coffee, it's going to change my thinking because it will change my physiology. And then I'll start thinking differently, I'll be maybe more paranoid about the world.

Also my perception, I'm going to start seeing the world differently and I'm going to become maybe more critical of self and others, which is going to create more anxiety. It's going to impact my social relationships.

Like me and you have a pretty good, I'd say, working relationship and friendship, but if I was anxious all the time, that might get strained. You might not want to be around me because I make you feel bad just from the kind of resonance of our bodies together.

And then it's like, he doesn't want to be around me and I start thinking maybe he hates me. And then you look at me looking at you with that anxiety and think, maybe he hates me. And before we know it, that relationship is broken. So we shouldn't take out the social side, I would say here too.

But in terms of where's the easiest access point? I often say the body. That depends and there's lots of good ways to work, I believe in different things for different people, but the body is visceral. It's

here. If I say to you, change your mind, it's like, how? And if I want to change a client's mind as a coach, I can't just be like, "Snap out of it".

[00:07:11]

I had, just an hour ago, I was doing a bit of coaching on Brighton seafront. I had a coach from Slovenia and just from her breath pattern, I could hear she was stressed. "Hello, Mark". I could hear her inner voice and I was like, all right, I won't give her name. Let's call her Sarah. I said, "Sarah, put your feet on the ground. Bend your knees slightly. Standing up. Take a breath. Okay, breathe out".

And I'm giving her specific instructions plus I'm co-regulating her by doing it myself. And I wasn't going to waste her time or mine saying, "What do you want to get out of the coaching?", before I'd done that because her thinking would be all off. Anxiety makes us dumb. Anxiety makes us antisocial and unkind and uncreative. It makes us conservative in the small C sense. And if we're going to do a coaching session together, that's the last thing she would want or would be helpful.

So being able to recognize it in ourselves and others and then being able to change it in ourselves and others, there are four concrete skills. This isn't some philosophical thing, this isn't abstract. I can teach those skills. I can employ those skills. I can get better at those skills rather than simply telling someone...

Like, there was that old comedy in Britain and there'd be two guys fighting and, "Calm down, calm down". The third one would come and say, "Calm down", and end up fighting him because the words don't really cut it. You can't talk someone out of it, but if you directly work with physiology, then it usually is much more impactful.

Alex Howard

One of the things that often also happens when we have anxiety, and particularly also you referenced trauma earlier, is that we will lose touch with our body. Like there's a speeding up that happens in the nervous system, the mind starts to race.

And in a sense, I think people find themselves trying to think their way back to the feeling of safety they want. Like that feeling of safety that comes from being grounded and being embodied, but of course we can't think our way to that place. It just continues more.

So I'd love to hear you say a little bit about that response that happens, but also what helps us begin that process of changing that direction.

Mark Walsh

It's a good point. There's a devilish link here between, stress makes us less embodied, less aware of our bodies, but being embodied makes us less stressed. So there is a vicious and a virtuous cycle that we can get into.

When people are very anxious, they are speeded up, and literally, an embody intervention could be something simple as walking a bit slower when you're going for a walk or not rushing around the kitchen, actually slowing your actions down a little bit. It's learning to recognize that speeded up-ness because it is numbing in and of itself.

[00:10:06]

And normally what you find is people have a window where they could recognize it. My student couldn't recognize it, but then as soon as I mentioned it, because she's had quite a lot of skills, she was like, oh, yeah, I'm all over the place. Thanks, Mark. Okay. And then she was easy to work with, but that's because she spent some time building up that skillset. Her window is maybe bigger than most people.

You'll hear the guy being like, "I'm not stressed!", that anger. The same fish really, just in a different direction. Think of anger as stress towards and against, rather than stress away from, which is anxiety. It's the same thing really.

So, what helps us come back to the body? Well, I came back from Ukraine yesterday. I've picked up vicariously a lot of anxiety from refugees and from people who have been bombed a lot, and directly. We went to the bomb shelter with sirens going off at least twice a day for a week. We were smart enough this time to make the bomb shelter a pretty suitable training room. But just being around the nervous systems of people who are a lot more fried than I am, I picked up on it.

So what did I do? Well, I came home, I saw my wife, co-regulation, lots of hugs. We went dancing in the evening. There's a wonderful rhythms dance class in old Church here, and it has this ritualistic quality which is helpful. It's the co-regulation of seeing friends and getting lots of hugs. It's just moving the body. It's pleasure.

Pleasure is, think of friends of embodiment. If you're in pleasure, if you're getting a massage, for example, a nice hug or dancing, and it feels good, then of course you want to come back to the body. And again, that not only interrupts the pattern of thinking, which is the standard sort of mindfulness, but we can also think in terms of charge.

So there are a number of embodiment systems which work with releasing charge held in the body. TRE is one that I work with and I teach something similar in Ukraine, like shaking modalities, tapping modalities. It seems like different things work for different people. I employ a bunch of them. Something as simple as walking or dancing however, can be it.

Particularly today I was walking by the seafront and again, it was like I got eco-regulation. Nature has that effect. On the last day of the training the staff team in Ukraine went to the sauna by the lake. It was very relaxing until a military helicopter flew across very low. But being by the lake, being in the woods, these things are helpful.

So we have the discharge methods, simply being around people, places and pleasure. So being around other embodied people calls you back to embodiment, like last night with the dance and the community there, so community, the pleasure aspects.

And then there's a way in which some people get a bit addicted to intensity as a way back into the body. So I'd say that's one to watch out for. You can sort of... like if we did a really hardcore hot yoga class or, God forbid, had some really kinky sex, Alex, and started whipping each other.

Alex Howard

Not on a Thursday morning, I'm afraid.

[00:13:24] Mark Walsh

They were raving on a Thursday morning on the beach in Brighton. Only in Brighton do you hear dance music on Thursday morning.

But hardcore, intense things for the body, they work for reducing anxiety, but there's a danger of addiction there, so be a little bit careful with that.

So lots of ways back to the body, all of them useful. There's the discharge methods, there's the simple methods that encourage coming back to the body. And then there's the actual working directly with the fight, flight response in the body, things like centering and breathwork and different techniques.

Alex Howard

One of the things I noticed in my practice, in my experience, is that if I go through a sustained period of disconnect, either because I'm under big intensity at work or family life, whatever it may be, is that I almost forget for a while what the place is I'm trying to get back to.

And then I go and I spend some time with my wife, or I go and do some exercise or whatever it may be, and there's a sudden point of, oh yeah, that's what it feels like to be connected.

And I wonder if it would be helpful just to say a little bit about, when we are embodied, when we are in, to put it in polyvagal terms, safe and social, or just in a deeply relaxed state, what's the felt sense of that? What's the place that we're trying to come home to?

Mark Walsh

First of all, I love your questions, Alex. You've done so many good interviews with so many cool people. There's so much more value in your sessions because you really get to the crux of it. So I just want to flag that for listeners as well. We're lucky to have Alex.

Alex Howard

Thank you.

Mark Walsh

Yeah, really.

So in terms of, you're right, all states are self-justifying and self-sustaining. So any state we're in, anxiety, anger, calm, peace, whatever, will say this is the best way to be. And they're also willfully blind, as it were, to other states. There's a forgetting of what that's even like.

Now, I can describe it, and I think we would all describe something pretty similar, anxiety is forwards and up. Is it more up or down? More up. Is it more hot or cold? Hot. Is it more contracted or relaxed? Relaxed. Is it more open or closed? Closed. Listeners might argue with some of them, but I think generally that's a pretty universal human experience.

[00:15:44]

And you could call that something different than anxiety, but we still are talking about the same thing by another name. People call it stress or fear, whatever. Anxiety is normally up and anxiety up and back.

So learning to recognize the geography of it, the actual physicality of it. Right now I'm actually more anxious than I often am when I do a presentation. I'm still within the sort of window of I didn't call it off today. I'm still within the window of like, yeah, I think I could be relatively coherent, say something relatively intelligent. But I noticed a few of those markers in my body. A little bit of extra tension, my trapezius, my breath is one of the best indicators.

So learning to recognize it and if you can get it early before the numbing sets in, great. It's like I'm going there. All right. I deliberately chose to have this coaching session walking along the beach because I knew it would be good for me. I was like, this is going to help me. A bit of exercise, a bit of nature, a bit of fresh air. So learning to recognize it as soon as possible.

In terms of, I could describe it, but that's not the key thing. I think we need as many reference points as we can for ourselves. Right now am I like I am when I'm in my friend Claire's house in the Cambridge countryside eating cake with her and her parents? No. But I can bring back a memory and go, okay, what's that in the body? My shoulders drop, my head changes, this sort of ventral vagal tilt starts happening, my face starts enlivening on the ventral vagal thing, for those that know Stephen Porges' polyvagal theory work, and I've got a reference point that's quite easy.

I think the other reference point is the people around us. And this is why working in a war zone or working in a company where everyone is just stressed the whole time is tricky because it becomes normal. Like, do we have an environment where we go... I go hang out with my hippie mates after being in some stressed business. And I'm like, oh, yeah, that's what it's like. So I think that social reference point is really helpful as well.

Alex Howard

You mentioned numbness, and I want to go into that a bit more because I was just reflecting as you were talking, but I know the place where I can be anxious, where everything's a bit too fast, my mind is racing. And often in that place, it's like I'm trying to get something. There's a deficiency that I'm trying to fill by either the thinking or the rushing, whatever it may be.

And I also know that place where I'm in a deeply relaxed state, where there's an inherent nourishment that comes from that place of deep relaxation, like it's self-generating and self-sustaining.

But I also noticed that there's another place which is sometimes, perhaps a place between or a place above the anxiety where I'm just a bit numb. And I think that's a particularly problematic place because in that numbness it's like I can't find anything I really want to watch on TV, I don't really want to exercise, I'm less likely to eat well. There's a sort of shutdown place where poor choices often...

Like in a state of anxiety it almost like we know we need to slow things down. In a place of that deep relaxation, we're fine, but that numbness shuts down, I think often can go back to those vicious circles. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

[00:19:17] Mark Walsh

We have a traffic light model that we use which is a simplification of polyvagal theory. And we say green light, rest and digest. We recognize that. Yellow light is also really worth distinguishing from flight to flight, which is active and engaged but still relaxed. So if you're doing sports, if you are socially in play mode, that's really helpful to have that distinction, because some people don't. They feel like it's even tense, anxious action or nothing.

So that's the first thing I'd say. Get that distinction. Orange is the stress, the fight or flight. We could subdivide that, aggression, anxiety, but pretty much the same thing. Learning to recognize that.

But then there's also the red, which is the shutdown. And that can look like a catastrophic traumatic shutdown, like a soldier that has almost rigamortis, frozen in terror. This is one of the things we've come across in Ukraine. But it can also just exist on a low level effigy, as you say, like that sort of sitting on the couch. And then it's not coming down that we need, it's waking up.

So I might do a shaking technique or some tapping on the body. Not even like special energy tapping or something, just wake up. Go out in the fresh air, take a walk along Brighton seafront, get the wind in my face kind of thing, feel alive again. That is another piece. And that's even more numbing than I would say, than the fight or flight response.

Alex Howard

That's a really good point because I think sometimes people think, if I'm anxious, what I need is to slow everything down. And what you're saying is actually sometimes what we need to do is to temporarily maybe speed up to actually move the energy in the system.

Mark Walsh

So what is it that they're calling anxiety? Is it this kind of dorsal shutdown which may need waking up or is it more of a fight or flight, parasympathetic arousal where people do need to calm down?

There's one more factor here, though, which is that we operate like a heartbeat. So, for example, the calmest I am is after lifting weights in a gym and then having a sauna. Think of a sexual cycle, think of weight lifting, things like, you do some martial arts and you meditate. Sometimes going up to then go down can be very helpful.

I say to my students, if you're trying to get less stress and you're doing centering and the meditation is not working, then don't peak it, go for a run, do the weight lifting, do something that's intense, and then you kind of allow a natural cycle to complete. Because anxiety is wanting action. It's saying, do something, do something. There's a problem here. You're not safe. Do something. So if you do something that lets the body go, okay, now we can relax.

You get these kinds of strategies for working with things. Sometimes you can take it, like my student said, I tried centering. It's not working. It's not working. It's not working. And centering is often very just immediately useful and helpful.

Something like the ABC technique where balance, core relax, like classic stuff we teach. But if you're doing that and it's not working, then it's like, alright, maybe I need to go crazy dancing, maybe I need to do the trauma work.

[00:22:31]

The other one tends to be in personal growth, people rely on self-regulation a lot or what I might call the feo-regulation, which is like spiritual techniques, another one of my made up words. But if the self-regulation isn't working that well, this is where you go to the co-regulation or the eco-regulation.

So I had in my diary the other day, do yoga, and I was just like fuck this and I just went to the park and it was just so much better than doing yoga. So moving between those four, having a balance and it's like four food groups of nourishment, I think is very helpful.

Alex Howard

I think I know some of the answer to this, but I still think it's an important question. I don't want to put the answer too much in your mouth, but how important are our practices here?

Because part of what we're talking about is more of that immediate, I recognize I need something, so I do it. But you gave the example of your student, for example, who has spent that time in those practices and therefore is able to draw upon that.

So I know that you're someone that loves going deep into different techniques and practices and has some significant mastery in certain embodiment practices, but say a bit about what the impacts and the importance of those daily practices versus just responding in a crisis.

Mark Walsh

So we need practice, place and people, three things that are going to help our nervous system. But of those three, in some ways the least powerful one, but it's the one we have the most agency over, is practice.

So I talk about it in my books and I'm obsessed with this topic, most embodiment people are because it's how we learn anything. Like I'm learning Ukrainian on Duolingo right now. You have to practice, it's how you get better at any skill, driving, tennis, languages, whatever. And anxiety, spotting it and regulating it, is a skill.

The key thing is that when we're in a stress state, our skill level actually goes down quite a lot. So you're better to have practiced it when you don't need it. So most people don't have even a linguistic distinction between practice and application. Application is when the kids are screaming or you're doing a big talk for, let's say, a major search engine provider later today and I'm anxious about it. It's a big gig. I've not worked with them before, they're a well known company. And it's like that's why I need to apply what I've practiced.

And most people, it's not a very Western thing to do unless you do sports, is to practice a lot. The average business person performs a lot, practices very little. So that ethos, I think I probably got from martial arts, practicing a lot for that one time you need it. That's just so helpful with this skill set.

Alex Howard

It's like what I'm hearing you say is it's moving from a place of constantly being reactive to, oh, I'm anxious, I need to deploy a technique to actually being proactive, and I need to retrain my nervous system. Or I need to master certain tools and strategies so when I need them, I'm going to be able to use them.

[00:25:40]

But I suppose the challenge is, the more anxious we become, it goes back to that vicious virtual circle thing, the more anxious we become, sometimes the harder it is to commit to the practices that we need to develop.

Mark Walsh

I tend to give people micro practices. Like, my student today is a fairly young mother, and she has some time challenges, very stressed challenges. And we found her a couple of 1 minute practices. Try and make them short, set up a reminder system. In her case, it was getting a buddy, for someone else it might be an app or a reminder on the phone.

On our coaching course, we literally just get people to set an alarm 5 times a day on their phone, and then when it goes off, they do a mini 1 minute practice. They end up getting 5 practices for 1 minute every single day.

We book in their day, which helps as well. So it's in the morning, so it's in the evening. We build them up very gradually. We got good on this in our course, it's like building up from the beginning. I think you did this on yours as well. It's not all at once. And they have some peer groups, accountability, they have Daniela or Alina who are course managers, reminding them to do things. This is the benefit of studying on one of your courses or mine as opposed to reading a book and trying to wing it.

I always say, people go to these free events and they get a lot of information, and that's great, but unless you've committed to something with, like one of your courses where it's like... I'm being a bit sales-y for you here now. Forgive me.

Alex Howard

I'll send you a cheque afterwards, you're fine.

Mark Walsh

Yeah, send me the invoice.

But there's a reason that courses are good as opposed to just reading a book or listening to a podcast. You need some sort of structured system. That's usually what makes a difference for people.

And doing it before, I think there's something else here around self-forgiveness as well. Like, even if someone teaches this stuff, I'm not perfectly regulated today. I'm a bit stressed about my business, I've got a little bit of a trauma hangover from being in Ukraine. I've got a spa booked this weekend, I'm doing the right things. I'm making sure I'm in integrity.

I'm not taking on this interview, for example, if I was too bad, I would have given you a phone call. I'm checking in with people around me to check I'm not too crazy. But there's also something like it's okay not to be perfect or else the spiritual bypassing comes in trying to be not... I am Zen the entire time. It's like, no, you're just a bit creepy and weird.

[00:28:05] Alex Howard

Or you have an ego attachment to everyone thinking your Zen the whole time, which in of itself is a little concerning.

Mark Walsh

Yeah, look how calm I am. I'm better than you.

So I think a certain forgiveness there, a certain humanness is necessary as an adjunct to practicing.

Alex Howard

What I'm also hearing you say is the importance of awareness. Again, like the way you're talking about your experience today, to be able to recognize actually, these weren't quite the words but, I'm tight in my shoulders and my breathing is not quite where it needs to be. That awareness, then, is a potential pathway to addressing it.

Whereas the difficulty is when we get so normalized to being in a state of anxiety that we actually don't recognize that's what's happening.

Mark Walsh

Yes and people don't recognize it. I do online sessions for the Ukrainians, and sometimes they're just like, wow, it's such a gift just being around someone who isn't stressed or is less stressed than us, because it just reminds them that that's possible for them.

Things getting normalized in companies, even in whole countries, I'd say is a real issue. And you'll notice it's like it's a shock. Even when I come up from Brighton to London, it's like, well, I feel stressed here. They don't feel stressed, that's just the speed of London. And it's funny. You get off the train in Brighton and you go, ahh. It's like someone playing the piano and two guys kissing, you just relax. And then you go, oh, I didn't even realize I was running around.

Alex Howard

Well, I take it a step further, which is that there's almost a self-importance that comes from I'm busy enough to be stressed.

Mark Walsh

"I'm busy", that's the common response now. What people should say is, how are you? Instead of busy they should say, "I've over committed as a form of self-abuse and now lack integrity because I won't be able to fulfill my promises". And that would be a whole lot less popular than "Busy".

Alex Howard

I'm sure part of the answer to this question is very much people with personal preferences and how their body responds, but are there particular practices... I'll phase this differently. For someone that's watching this who recognizes they're anxious, they're resonating with a lot of what you're saying in terms of that anxiety being a very bodily based experience, they recognize they need to have an

embodiment practice, how would they find their pathway to the better choices of what's going to most support them?

[00:30:38] Mark Walsh

Good thing, I mean, first of all, don't use embodiment just as an enabling practice if your life is a mess and you've not got good boundaries and you're in an abusive relationship and you're not keeping boundaries at work and your environment is terrible, blah, blah, blah. So first of all, just say that as an aside, it's just one piece of the puzzle.

I always say with embodiment practice, though, you do what you love, do what you love. And the most important practice is, the best practice is the one you do. Where we have to be a little bit careful of that, as a sort of put in brackets, like... but make sure you're not just deepening in neurosis.

There are people who take up a practice, a form of dance where they're really unstable, or certain kinds of yoga where people just get more and more neurotic and OCD about controlling themselves. And it's like, yeah, it might reduce my anxiety, but at the expense of becoming a massive, what Daniela calls, a control enthusiast.

Alex Howard

That's really good. I like that.

Mark Walsh

We both love her, she's awesome. She won't mind me teasing her. She makes that joke herself.

So we've got to be a little bit careful with our embodiment practices. We're not building up some other kind of way of being which is actually just deepening the way we're already crazy.

But that being said, if people are beginners, particularly anybody is great. Like, someone came into their first class last night and the teacher is like, is it your first time? And I was like, yes, great. Just a regular looking guy, young guy. And I was like, brilliant, welcome to the club. You're going to love it.

And try a few things as well. Like, yoga isn't yoga, there's even five different types of yoga these days. So if you don't get on with one type of yoga, try something else. And do you enjoy it? If you enjoy it, convenience and enjoyment are bigger factors in picking the perfect practice.

If it's near your house and your wife drags you along and you like it, you're probably going to keep it. One reason I do 5Rhythms is my wife will go with me. And she'll go to Jim Karen's yoga class, and that's the only yoga class she'll go to. So, lo and behold, we do those two practices. It's much harder for me to get to a practice that she won't do because I want to spend time with her and one of us gets the other one out the door.

Alex Howard

It's also true, though, I think that sometimes the breakthrough at one stage becomes the limitation at the next stage. The practice that was really the breakthrough that got us to a certain point has now, there's like a diminishing return or switching it up or bringing something else in can take us to the next stage.

[00:33:21] Mark Walsh

Yeah, I would say the first group of people don't have any body practice, just do anything. Just do what you enjoy, do what's convenient, and do what you like.

The second group of people, they've been doing something for a while, and I think diminishing returns is the key phrase. I did Aikido for many years and got my black belt as a living Aikido. It's fantastic for me. But at a certain point, I was trying to feel safe by developing martial arts skills. And I'm probably more badass than 90% of Brits and 20% of Ukrainians.

Alex Howard

Maybe 5% at this point.

Mark Walsh

But I've built up certain self-defense skills, fighting skills, but I still had some fear, had some problems. I was like, oh, I've got trauma, I need to do some trauma work. Or just missing an opportunity. Like, I remember I learned tango dancing after 10 years of Aikido. I was like, oh, this is fantastic. Beautiful women in fabulous shoes and music and it's social and there's a whole different group of people. It just opened up a whole other door that Aikido didn't open.

So I think for our second group of people who maybe are already, like a lot of people listen to this, they already have a dance or a yoga practice or something, what's really worth considering is sort of rounding yourself out a little bit.

And that's difficult because we get good at something and then it's a secure place and we get social kudos for it. I can walk into Aikido and put on my black belt all the beginners like, oh, it's a black belt. Whereas if I walk into even Taekwondo I don't, it could be a white belt. So there's a little bit of attachment that can hold people back sometimes, but just be honest with yourself.

Third category will be people who are super embodiment geeks, coaches working with embodiment. That's another category altogether, because you're also thinking and doing things for my clients and to recommend things and to have that breadth of perspective for my clients. So just a side note if people are listening who are hardcore embodiment coaches.

Alex Howard

So I find myself thinking, as you're describing those different explorations, there's also something about the place from which we approach the practice. And I'm particularly thinking if someone's got anxiety of how that might shape learning a new practice.

Mark Walsh

If we approach the practice, it's like if you approach the solution in the manner of the problem, you've just got a new problem. It's kind of mis-quoting Einstein a little bit here. If I approach my meditation with an overachievement type A personality work ethic, I haven't done anything. So nothing useful.

So I think one of the key insights of embodiment is how we do what we do is what we do. And in that way, you could almost do anything as a way to reduce anxiety. And you can do anything as a way to increase anxiety. How am I approaching?

[00:36:25]

Let's go back to my language learning app I'm a bit obsessed with the moment, like a good addictive personality. And it's like I started to find it stressful and annoying and I'm hitting it and I can see my movement. What am I doing? I'm approaching this in a really unintelligent way.

And to approach a stress reduction practice is a have to, as a should, as too competitive. I'm not against little competition, but certainly too much competition, too much to brutalize ourselves with our practices so it's just another chore. I think that's another trap that's sadly quite possible.

Alex Howard

So I'm mindful as we get towards the end, how we wrap it up into some kind of really simple starting points.

So someone that's watching this and is going, okay, maybe they're in that 1st, 2nd category. Perhaps they've done some practices. Perhaps it's not as consistent as it needs to be, or perhaps the way they're approaching it is not as helpful as it could be.

What do you see the people that go from that place to really nailing it? And what I mean by nailing it is they get consistent, they are impactful in terms of their experience. What helps people get to that place?

Mark Walsh

It's the balance of following bodily yearning, longing, intuition and commitment and discipline. And you need both. And people usually have half of that equation. I think they are the two sides of it.

So on the one hand, it's like, you know what? I need to feel deeply into what I want to do. But then it's like, you might want to commit to that for 3 months to actually really get a good grip of it before changing something else.

So, yeah, I see it's that balance. I do see it as an ever moving thing as well. If someone's doing what they were doing 10 years ago exactly the same, it's probably no longer the right thing for them.

So, there are a couple of pointers. And for people listening who are new to this, there are physical techniques as well. Even something as simple as... 10 second technique takes very little training. There are subtleties to it, but I'm less anxious having done that than I was before. Stand up and have a shake and tap yourself. I want to give people this practical stuff.

People can go to YouTube if they want to see ABC centering. There's all sorts of resources out there. I like to put things out for free, lots of resources on different practices. And there's so many good teachers out there, including many that you host, pointing people to actually practicing something rather than just thinking about it.

And preferably doing something with the community, with a teacher, with some structure and accountability, which may be a course, it may be something else. So point people to that as a way of, not just the way in which we can just consume all the podcasts and all the conferences and all the information, but it's not the information that cuts it. Wikipedia hasn't solved all the world's problems just yet. We need more than information.

[00:39:40] Alex Howard

Well, I guess that's where the body is so important in what you're talking about. But if you're just thinking about it and you're talking about it and you're sort of strategizing about it and planning about it, you're still in the anxiety place. You're not actually coming home to the beholding and the support that's there in the body.

Mark Walsh

Sometimes it's as simple as people go for a walk in the woods and they come back and go, yeah, all that clever strategy stuff I was trying to work out in my head before, that's not even necessary anymore. Like we do a letting go pose, which is from a system called Embodied Yoga Principles I created, or Toolkit we sometimes call it. Just simply a hanging forward bend.

And sometimes simply by letting go in the body, they go, I'm not worried about this anymore. It's just gone. Bodily gestures. Sometimes I'm coaching people, stand up, move your body, like so simple can be the answer. And of course, if you're working on body work in a more complex way, a more skilled practitioner, that's good, too.

Alex Howard

Awesome. For people that want to find out more about you and your work, what's the best place to go and what some of what they can find?

Mark Walsh

Tinder. No. embodimentunlimited.com or if you just put the word "Embodiment" into the internet, then if you like books, there'll be a book, if you like podcasts, there'll be a podcast.

But embodimentunlimited.com is the one that has free resources, the podcast, there's a free book there. There's a load of free stuff there. So if you want to kind of see it all in one place then embodimentunlimited.com would be the place to go.

Alex Howard

Awesome. And then do you want to say a few words just in finishing around Sane Ukraine, if people want to support that in any way?

Mark Walsh

Yeah, I mean, Sane Ukraine is now run locally. I'm now an employee of Sane Ukraine as opposed to running it, which is cool. There's a couple of Ukrainian women who are now running that.

So if people want to support the efforts to reduce some of the suffering of war, they can go to saneukraine.com or if they speak Ukrainian, we have daily sessions in Sane Ukraine online or daily sessions for people.

And please do spread the word about that. If you know Ukrainians, let them know that's happening. And yeah, it's just very cool. So the vision really is to make Lviv the world's most trauma aware city.

[00:42:01]

There's hope. The world is getting more aware of stress and trauma and anxiety and these kind of topics. And while terrible things like war happen, ending on a positive note, I think it's super cool that there are now a couple of hundred trainers that we've trained in Lviv who are working with soldiers and kids and refugees. And we're not the only organization doing stuff like that. So very cool that this information about these topics is spreading across the whole world.

Alex Howard

Awesome. Mark, it's always a pleasure. Thank you so much.

Mark Walsh

Pleasure. Nice to see you, Alex.