

# LBS2E7- Getting Psyched With The Schiafone Brothers

**Naomi:** Welcome to Living Blind. I'm your host, Naomi Haslett. This podcast is brought to you by BALANCE for Blind Adults, located in Toronto, Canada. This season of Living Blind is sponsored by AMI. Here at living blind, we explore the perspectives and lived experiences of people with sight loss, and delve into the barriers, challenges, and real life strategies for living life to the fullest.

Today, we have a double feature for you as I'm joined by Chris and Brandon Schiafone or as we like to refer to them, the Schiafone brothers. Both of them have degrees in psychology, but come from very different backgrounds. Chris has recently completed his first undergraduate degree in psychology, a diploma in general arts and science, and a certificate and research skills and analysis from Humber College.

He holds a social service worker diploma from Seneca College, which he received in 2015. He's been working as a data and accessibility analyst for SenseTech Solutions, and is currently investigating a master's degree in the areas of psychology, neuroscience and design. Brandon is a graduate from the behavioral psychology degree at Seneca College. Throughout his professional career, he has worked in advertising, job development and training, life coaching, and professional development. He's a professional public speaker who, in addition to winning awards from Toastmasters and Toronto Speaker Slam competitions, has also planned and executed monthly motivational speaking events under the "Mo Mondays" and "Unbrand" banners; and brought the first TEDx conference to the town of Newmarket, Ontario. Brandon's future will see him using his background in life coaching along with his education in psychology, to become a certified and practicing Couples Counselor. We discussed how psychology has helped in the advancement of their careers, their experience in post-secondary education as blind and low vision students, and the transition to virtual learning during the pandemic. We also have a surprise at the end of this interview, so stay tuned! Welcome to the show, Chris and Brandon.

**Brandon:** Thanks for having us.

**Chris:** Thank you.

**Naomi:** So, first thing I would like to ask is for you to tell me a little bit about how both of you started on your path to education. So, you know, what, what was the first program you enrolled in? And maybe tell me a little bit about what it was that interested you? Uh, maybe we can start with Chris.

**Chris:** So my educational journey actually started back in 2012. Um, after I attempted to land a few different jobs. I went to Seneca College to take my Social Service Worker diploma. So I was studying there from 2012 to 2015. Throughout my time there, I did a couple of different placements, uh, that were part of the degree. Excuse me. We were required to do 600 hours of commute, uh, uh, placement time. So, part of that, I was working with the vision loss community. The other part of that, I was working with adults who had intellectual disabilities. And so during that time, especially towards the end, I began to try and decide whether that was the ending point for me or whether I wanted to go on to university and study something else. I made that decision, but then came the question... what... what do I want to study? I looked at social work. I looked at human rights and equity studies... and a few other places. And really at the end of the day, going through the different schools and the different programs and what was involved in studying in different places, I applied at a few different ones, but got into the University of Guelph Humber psychology program first, which actually became my practice.

So I started there in 2016 and I just finished my last semester in December of 2021. In the time there, um, Brandon and I actually traveled together to Nova Scotia to present to the Canadian Psychological Association. Uh, we presented for the Cognitive Science Society and I completed my undergraduate thesis, uh, which was titled "Improving Accessibility of Scientific Content for the Blind Through Cross Sensory Methods". And it was basically an approach to look at how science education and research can be enhanced for persons with vision loss. So that's where I am right now, as far as an education training.

**Naomi:** Thanks, Chris. And, uh, how about you, Brandon?

**Brandon:** So my, my post-secondary education began back in 2010, uh, shortly after finishing high school. Uh, I'll I'll admit kind of getting out of, out of high school and going into university I had absolutely zero idea what I wanted to do. But I was very passionate about writing and I loved to kind of, uh, the ability to be creative, that, that writing was an outlet that could be an outlet for. So, uh, I decided, uh, what's the best way to, to sort of make a career out of being able to write, and I went into a, I took my degree in journalism. Um, about halfway through, uh, I was actually at the University of Guelph Humber at the time, going through their media studies degree. But about halfway through, I was, I

was having doubts. I wasn't sure if exactly it was what I wanted to do. Uh, the journalism field seemed like it was kind of growing a little bit, bare bones. Things were sort of breaking down. Um, things like the newspaper and magazines were sort of coming to their close. Uh, you know, they used to be some very prominent and, and you know, now everything's kind of shifting to online. So, uh, fewer and fewer journalists were being needed.

Uh, so I thought, okay, well, how can I sort of maximize my education here? So I, I split it up and I did half journalism and half public relations. Um, after graduating, I had the toughest time finding, uh, finding any kind of work in that particular field, uh, despite coming through and doing fairly well with my studies. Uh, so I actually went through an employability program through the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work called "Youth The Future". And it was a new program that had started up, uh, out of their office in Brampton, Ontario. And, uh, through them, I was actually lucky enough to land a, um, a position at Metroland Media, which is a very big, big community news corporation in Ontario. Uh, but I was in their advertising department, which is fine. I mean, you're still on the field. You're still, you know, getting, getting your feet wet, as far as, as the work world is concerned. But of course, uh, advertising wasn't really what I was passionate about. So I, you know, I began looking around and it turns out that the CCRW uh, was launching a new expansion of their "Youth The Future" program at Scarborough. And I applied and got the, uh, the facilitator position for that program. So I actually, uh, you know, I got my first job through them and then ended up working for them in the end, doing the facilitating program in their Scarborough office. And that was really fun and really rewarding, um, but again, it wasn't necessarily what I was looking to do. And at this point I kind of had fallen back into a position where I wasn't really sure what I wanted to continue on the path of. At that point I'd started my life coaching journey, uh, learning about, you know, did the, the practice of coaching and all the techniques and tricks. Um, I'd also. I started my speaking career, I started doing a little bit of public speaking and actually have done a fair, a fair bit of it since then. Um, but I've always been kind of fascinated by why people do what they do. What motivates them, what drives them, uh, what determines their day-to-day activities? Chris and I had both sort of happened upon, uh, Seneca College's Behavioral Psychology program and you know, it wasn't ever anything that I thought maybe, "Hey, I could do". Um, but I'm like, you know what? This theme is really, really interesting. So I gave it a shot. And at the same time, I became a Certified Life Coach. Uh, I started doing more and more public speaking. And, uh, you know, I really found that I was sort of passionate about, uh, relationships, how people integrate, how people connect, uh, both romantic and social, uh, and kind of the fundamental surrounding that. Uh, so I really wanted to, uh, shift my focus to that being what

I, what I kind of targeted as far as my business and, and what I wanted to do for the future.

So, the great thing about coaching is I can't, I can't speak highly enough about the art of Life Coaching as far as what it can do for people, if done correctly, how it can impact and influence people's lives. Uh, but the thing is that people need to remember about coaches is that we are not therapists. Um, we can help guide people along the path to living a better life, but if there are some serious traumas, serious mental health things going on, we can't, and we shouldn't be, um, trying to navigate those without the proper education.

Uh, the problem with that is, is it okay? Well now I'm a coach. Someone comes to me, they have a legitimate mental health concern. I'm not equipped to deal with that. So now I have to refer them to a Therapist. They have to go to the Therapist, build rapport with the Therapist. It puts a whole like a big hold on their recovery, on their, on their treatment, on their, their push forward. So my thought was okay, not only do I love the idea of having the formal education of psychology, but what I can do is essentially become a sort of one-stop shop for my clients as they come in. I can have the tools to provide them legitimate therapy, as well as provide them with a blueprint from life coaching and creating a better life for themselves.

So ultimately I, I went through and I finished my degree at Seneca College, um, about a year, almost a year ago. Now last April was my final class, uh, and I am, with shortly within any luck to be, uh, looking to enroll in a master's program in psychology, kind of focusing again on, uh, relationships and social paradigms.

**Naomi:** Wow. I mean, there's a lot going on from both of you in terms of both your, your journey and where you started and where you are now. And there's, there's a lot to, to dive in to, for sure. I mean, the name of the episode is "Getting Psyched". So maybe that is a great starting point to, to dive into for both of you. Um, maybe we can start with Chris. What is it about psychology that really draws your interest?

**Chris:** I find that psychology is very interesting. There's a wide, wide array of areas that you could study, whether it's social personalities, sports psychology, um, different types of behavior patterns, counseling psychology, clinical psychology, there's all kinds of different streams that you can go into. Particular for me. Um, and we'll go back to 2017 here because this is where I started to really grab my interest. Um, I was enrolled in a neuroscience class at the time, which was very, very difficult because it was based on uh, lots and lots of diagrams of different things. The brain, the nervous system, neurons, uh,

anything that's to do is scientific stuff to do with the brain and that sort of thing, we touched on it. And back at that time, it's like, okay, so this is challenging, I can't see any of this, I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn't realize it was going to be this hard, so what can I do? But my professor was absolutely fantastic. She went out of her way to ensure that she explained things that she set things up. Uh, we got a model of the human brain that, uh, could be taken apart so that I can examine it in the class. We got a model of a motor neuron. And the more that I started to see this, and the more that I studied it, the more fascinated I was with it and the more interested I got in it. Second to that, I still had the realization that, um, two things, one, this is still very challenging because it's visual.

Diagrammatic pieces of it are very visual. It was challenging as somebody who had no vision. But also the types of models and things that you buy, anatomical models that could be used can also be very expensive. So at that time, we started on a very low scale looking at how can this type of thing be integrated into education, that is not going to be so costly for a student, but also they could still learn? Because there's no reason why a student with vision loss can't study science, right? There's no reason at all that we can't do that with the proper adaptations. So that is the direction that I've taken. Up till now is, and still working on to this point is looking at inclusive instruction for persons with vision loss in stem fields. Because there is a very much an under-representation, uh, of this right now and myself and actually a research team are working on this right now from, from the university. So I'm excited to see where it goes from that point.

**Naomi:** Yeah, for sure. You made a good point about how psychology, I mean, there are parts that are not visual, however, a lot of theories and models seem to have visual representations. And then you also made that great point about just the brain and how often anatomy and neuroanatomy, uses a lot of visuals. I mean, the only, other than making a model there, the alternative would be maybe to get your hands on a specimen, but that's not very easy to do. So I guess I'm curious, do you have any, um, what kinds of strategies other than description, you know, can educators use to make their classes more accessible, whether it's for psychology or other programs, I'm either of you can answer that one.

**Brandon:** Well, Christopher did mention the models. The models are really, really cool. I didn't work with them so much because my program didn't have a whole lot of, as far as neuroscience. There was a couple of classes that sort of touched on it, uh, but nothing that necessarily really required me to know of sort of the layout of the brain, or sort of have a... really a visual aspect. It was more

just knowing what the individual sort of, uh, hemispheres and the individual parts did. Uh, for me though, it was really about, uh, cause we, we behavioral psychology it's, a lot of data, it's a lot of, uh, sort of navigating and mapping the kind of different human behaviors, especially through with interventions. So you're graphing quite a bit. And the, what people would do for graphs in my program is they would use basically an Excel extension, um, with Microsoft Excel and sort of graph things that way. But for some, with no vision, that's just plain not happening, unfortunately. Um, so what my professors did was we got a little crafty. Uh, so, uh, my program coordinator went out and they bought a metallic cookie sheet, uh, some Silly Putty and some magnets. And what we did is we basically made a tactile chart using these sort of these little construction pieces, basically, uh, where we had a completely tactile grid. Uh, we put the silly putty down for the lines. Uh, we use the, the magnets for the data points, and basically I could track and map everything using that particular sort of crafty version of a graph.

**Naomi:** That is so creative. I love it. So did you like score lines in the cookie sheet to represent the graph?

**Brandon:** No. We just used all different sorts of, we just used a Silly Putty, uh, as far as making sure like the magnets would basically indicate data points and, and sort of the behavior changes as they were happening. And if we needed to, um, if we need to start make sort of lines in between the data points, we could do that with, with the Silly Putty, but mostly it was just making sure that data points for correctly placed. And, uh, that, and you know, of course, since they're magnets, I can just easily move them around and manipulate them any way that, uh, that makes sense that that works with what I'm trying to chart.

**Naomi:** Huh? Yeah, no, both of you have really spoken to creative solutions. I think, I'm really happy to hear that for the most part or overall people in your program were open to trying things in a different way or adopting the task. Have either of you experienced other sorts of barriers in your educational career?

**Chris:** I could speak to that a little bit. Um, based on just overall setup of types of things that someone with vision loss would need in order to function fully in a classroom. Um, a very good example of that is accessible textbooks. Though, because again, of the, the large amounts of scientific content that was included in my textbooks, this uh, content had to be sent off to the Alternative Media person who did whatever she needed to do, to be able to make that textbook in a form that she was able to do. And I'll tell you with a Statistics textbook, it's not that easy to do. Um, I had to take two Statistics classes in order to be able to

write my thesis and those books again, are all charts, graphs, diagrams, uh, different types of tests that you'd have to do like a T test or analysis of variance. These different types of things that you'd use to analyze data, and that sort of thing was not easy nor were the anatomical type textbooks. Because basically where you would have graphical information, it had to be transcribed in such a way that I can actually understand what it is and the connections to the rest of the material. So that was a bit of a challenge. And I had a couple of examples where, for example, uh, I was in a class and due to, you know, whatever situation at the time, I didn't receive my textbook until late in the semester. So I was following along in class, but I didn't have a textbook to follow through, but the rest of the students did.

**Brandon:** And that is a common problem that many students, unfortunately, in this day and age, hopefully there'll be some improvement in the future, but the main problem that I think anybody will find with accessibility as far as, uh, their, their university or college programs is going to be that textbooks are quite slow as far as getting delivered.

**Naomi:** Hmm.

**Chris:** I had one instance actually, where I didn't receive my textbook until just after the mid-term. Which if you can imagine, is extremely difficult to try and study for a class at that point.

**Brandon:** Only one instance? Lucky you.

**Chris:** (laughs) Well, I guess I was lucky yeah?

**Naomi:** Well, I dunno about that, but it's from what I'm hearing is getting access to the information in an accessible way, just because of the, I mean, unfortunately it seems like these textbooks and materials are not designed for the time being, inclusively. So you have to, you know, ask somebody to convert the material for you, and that takes some time.

**Chris:** Yeah, it also depends on when the, when the book lists or the material lists can be accessed. So for example, if I'm starting school in September, and we're not able to gain access to the semester material until the end of August, that becomes a very big challenge because now we have to get the material, purchase the material, give the material to the Alternative Media people, and then they have to prepare that material for us to have in our semester. And us not being the only students, I would imagine, especially if there's not many people doing this at once, it could get quite challenging.

**Brandon:** And honestly, that, uh, I think in a lot of cases, uh, for people who are considering going to school, uh, that could be a bit of a point of discouragement. Uh, but two things I'll say to that point is that first of all, uh, accommodations can, and often will be made as, uh, people are at the schools are very sensitive to the fact that you need alternative materials generally and will make what accommodations are necessary. And second of all, uh, just to, to a point, is that what you're doing by going and getting these materials done, um, by taking that leap of faith and, and then, you know, trying to, you know, do your best at, at school, despite the fact that materials might take a bit, a bit to get to you. And what you're doing is you're essentially pioneering the accessibility and the accommodations for future students. You know, because blind people in, in post-secondary, we are not by any means, uh, a commonality or even, you know, a majority or any, anything like that. Uh, so by going in and basically forcing them to take a good hard look at how they can make their programs more accessible for people with vision loss, we're essentially pioneering a whole section of the academic field.

**Chris:** I cannot encourage enough, any students that are looking to go into post-secondary education. The more that you can advocate for yourself on your behalf, the more you can go to your professors and say, "this is what I need", oftentimes the more successful things will be. There may be times where we would need assistance from, let's say, Accessible Learning Services, because you need an accommodation, that somebody, who's not sure how to make, and that's perfectly fine, everybody has different levels of knowledge and experience around this. But we really need to be our own advocate as much as possible in order to be successful.

**Brandon:** Correct. Yeah. And just kind of drifting away from psychology there, um, it, you have to, as Chris said, you know, sort of advocate for yourself and, and help is available, uh, help is absolutely available. Uh, if you have someone, you know, at home that can help you, that's great. But the school also has resource departments. They have, uh, available budget in a lot of cases to, you know, pay a student peer. And one example just sort of out of the psychology realm was that when I was in my Media Studies program, one of the requirements was that I had to take a photography class. And while I did have some usable vision back then, it was absolutely not enough to make sure that I was doing quality work with photography. So luckily I had someone at home. I was able to sort of badger my mother to sort of give me a bit of a hand with a, you know, point of shoot and making sure that, uh, you know, I was doing things right. But ultimately that's what I had to do to ensure that I was completing the requirements of the program and I would come out on top. Um, so ultimately it really just, it is about advocating yourself. It's a hard truth, but no one's going to do it for you.



**Chris:** I can echo the same thing, when I got to the point where I needed to do a class called Quantification in Psychology 2, I was needing to use a piece of software that was required by the university called SPSS, which is a data analysis software. I've had a lot of challenges with it. Apparently it works with JAWS, but I've never had any luck. But regardless of the fact, I was very lucky to have access to a peer assistant who can actually help me with the working of the computer. So ultimately I'm doing the work. They don't do the work for you, but what they would be there to do is say click on something that you can't see or follow some steps within the software so that you can run your analysis and get your results and that sort of thing. And at times where you have classes where there's challenges like that, and those are requirements, and this, this was a requirement, first of all, because it was a course in the school, but also again, in order to get my research skills and analysis certificate and be able to do my undergraduate honors thesis, I had to pass this class. So it was very crucial that I reached out for assistance. Otherwise, I would have lost an awful lot if I had not done so. Another big thing is, is to not try and pursue these things last minute, so to speak. So if your goal is to get through a university level Statistics class, and you know, that's coming up in two semesters from now, probably not a good idea to wait for two semesters from now to try and figure out how you're going to deal with that situation. Start having the conversations, talk to people, talk to your Accessibility person. Talk to the Professor, talk to the Head Professor. Anything you need to do to ensure that your goals could be met because they're your goals. You can do it. You might need changes. You might need adaptation, but you can do it. So be persistent, be positive, work with people and everything will work out in the end.

**Naomi:** Right. So the takeaways here are, you know, sometimes you've got to forge a new path for yourself and what's great about that is. It makes it easier for others to follow. But at the same time, you can certainly reach out for assistance from the college, the university, because those resources are available and they can help you move forward in whatever you want to do with your degree.

So speaking of, um, I'm curious to know a little bit more from you, Brandon, about what you're doing with your degree. You mentioned that you're doing Life Coach work, and you're interested in the relationships part. So we've talked a little bit about research. How has your background in psychology and your education helped to help other people.

**Brandon:** Well, that's, we could talk for about an hour about that, to answer that question, but I guess essentially it's and Chris sort of mentioned it where, you know, the diversity is, is wonderful in the psychology field, in the sense of that, Chris is graduated, he's going onto research. I graduated, I'm going onto

the more therapy side of things. Uh, but ultimately, when it comes to coaching, coaching is great because you learn a lot about how to help navigate people, uh, in fixing their issues and helping to better their lives, uh, tackle the, the problems that they're facing and, and get themselves on a right on the right path from a practical sense. Uh, you know, small, significant changes, or even large significant changes that'll ultimately help them overcome whatever burdens, whatever issues, whatever problems they might be facing. Where the psychology comes into it all is, uh, two places really. Uh, the first is it helped me really kind of understand human behavior a little more deeply, and sort of the fundamentals and the techniques and everything that's sort of behind human behavior, the motivations. Um, and ultimately, as I mentioned earlier, it also helps with the deeper, more therapeutic aspects of what's causing the issues that we're going to ultimately help people tackle.

**Naomi:** Okay. Well, it's like you said, this is a huge topic and I'm a little, feeling a little guilty for asking it because I feel like if someone were to ask me, I would say, "how much time do you have", you know, as an occupational therapist. Knowing about the brain and behavior helps people have insights into patterns that they engage in. And sometimes those patterns are helpful and sometimes they're not. And I like, I like that you speak to what the person can control or that a person is able to kind of take the reins a little bit more with that understanding of themselves. Would you agree?

**Brandon:** No, absolutely. And a lot of people think, uh, they come into therapy or to coaching even with the wrong mind frame, in the sense of, they think as a "do to" process. But all of it, if it's going to be effective is a "do with" process. We want to do it with you, help you, uh, be sort of be your guides and your Sherpas along the way to make sure that you get from point A to point B and that we're not forcing you, you have to make it to want to make the changes. And that's why it's a "do with" as opposed to a "do to".

**Naomi:** Do you, in terms of your clientele, are they of all ages abilities, or do you focus in on any particular segment of the population?

**Brandon:** Not particularly. Um, and there's a lot of people that I work with who say that I should maybe narrow the niche down a little bit more than I have as far as who I work with and what my clientele looks like.

Um, but I will, I will say that the amount of coaching that I I've been doing is, has been sort of limited because I wanted to make, uh, ample enough space for my education, making sure I get everything done effectively. I didn't want to overwhelm myself. So, um, the coaching that I have done has been sort of with

people of all ages, I've had people who were middle-aged. I've had people who were just reaching their twenties. Uh, I've had men, I've had women, I've had couples. It just, it's been sort of a very diverse ride of, of, uh, and, and mixture of folks that I've had kind of come in and seek and seek help.

**Naomi:** Yeah, I think it's, it depends on, I hear what you're saying about settling down and focusing, sometimes it's hard to, especially if you have a keen interest in learning about people and, and all the things that they go through for lack of a better word.

**Brandon:** And in cases can be made for both sides. You know, there are of course cases and some of the, some of the most brilliant minds in business will say the, the closer down that you, you sort of make your target, uh, your target clientele, that the more effective you'll be. And then there's the other side of things where, you know, similarly brilliant minds of business will be like, well, the more people you can help, the better.

**Naomi:** That's an interesting topic. If we don't mind shifting a little bit. So, you know, Brandon, you've got a business angle to this, you know, you're, uh, independent, you know, practitioner or a coach. Um, now, you know, Chris, I know you're taking more of the research piece that, is that something that you're either interested in now or potentially in the future in terms of connecting your education to a career?

**Chris:** It is, and I've actually been doing it since 2019, tying the two them together. I have had experience working as a Research Assistant. Um, as I mentioned, uh, earlier I'm currently working with a team of researchers at Guelph Humber um, doing an inclusive study, sorry, inclusive instruction study, which looks at challenges experience with, uh, by persons with vision loss and higher education. Um, plus I've worked with some other teams, so I've worked with a variety of different teams. I've looked at anything from Inclusive Design type strategies. I've looked at education, um, accessibility, policy, those types of areas. Now, one thing I have not mentioned yet is I actually am currently just started training to be a life coach. Now I echo what Brandon says about having the background, which is why I didn't do it up until this point.

However, again, the, the organization I'm doing it through, Center for Applied Neuroscience, is ... they run different programs, but as the names kind of suggests again, it, it runs off neuroscience. So for me, it's been great so far. I'm not working with clients yet because I'm not that far ahead. But what this has allowed me to do to this point is take the neuroscience I learned in university, and it's starting to allow me to apply it to what life coaching is. So for example,

when you're working with the client, how are they like what's going on in their mind, even chemically. So looking at things like serotonin and dopamine. Um, emotions what's going on when people are happy, tying the brain to the nervous system. Uh, that kind of stuff. So that's why I decided to do it now, as opposed to when I was doing my degree. First of all, because my degree was very busy. But second of all, it's great because I finished the degree and now I can take this, it's a lot less hectic and I'm able to take what I've learned in psychology and tie it together with, uh, my psychology background and research and everything I've done so far.

**Naomi:** That's, that's exciting. I think that, you know, having both the side of research and practice, I think the two compliment each other really well because you know, of course it's important to have that lived or professional experience of interacting with people and helping them work through their challenges. But then, you know, depending on what you're researching, you can kind of go back and say, oh, I'm learning new things that I can maybe feed forward into the work I'm doing with people. So I feel like it's a good balance to have both of those things.

**Chris:** Yeah. And I think the important thing to remember too is sometimes people will go into studying a certain subject or within a certain area. And later on, they'll find that maybe it wasn't really, for them, it wasn't what they thought it was. And that's okay. But then you make a switch to something else that you, you think you might be interested in and you find you really like it. The approach I've sort of taken is, all of the education I've done, whether it was in social service, work, psychology, research or anything like that, even to go on now to, to a Master's, which I'm looking into doing not this year, but eventually that's my goal. In my mind, it, it all has to tie together. So when I went into psychology, I was looking for areas where social service work would tie into my psychology work. Where would research tie into psychology and social service work? And then if I go do a Master's, how can I tie my previous education into my Master's degree to then advance that so that I can, I could practice that at a Master's level and then either do teaching or research or whatever it is I plan to do afterwards.

**Naomi:** Yeah, that's a good point. And you're speaking again to what we talked about at the beginning, and that both of you have done multiple degrees. You've tried different things out and, you know, going to school or working it's, it's not a linear path. You can try things out and if you don't like them, that's fine. And it doesn't mean that it was a waste of your time. You still learn things along the way that you can apply. Just maybe in a different setting.

**Brandon:** What I was going to say, one of the, one of the core sort of, um, I guess themes of the coaching work that I've done, and the training that I've done is, is really stuck with me is that there's no such thing as "failure", only "feedback". So what that essentially means is that everything that you do is a learning experience. So even if things didn't necessarily go the way you thought, you know, what are you learning from it? Uh, how can you apply that to what's going to happen next? Uh, were you happy with the experience? Were you'r not happy with the experience? And if you weren't happy, what can you change for next time you give the, that experience a swing? Or what can you take from that experience to apply to the next thing that you plan to do.

**Naomi:** Yeah, for sure. I think that sometimes that's necessary. It feels to some people when they go into university or college, like the stakes are really high, you know, like I've got gotta, I've got succeed or I've got gotta, now that I have this degree, I've got to go work in this field and. I can only speak for myself, but that's not really how it worked out for, for me.

Um, and I think that, you know, it took a little bit of time off to figure out what I wanted to do. And fortunately I like OT, but honestly what, maybe I'll do something else down the line. I'm, I'm, I'm learning a lot along the way though, about what I like to do. So I think that's some really good advice for the listeners.

**Chris:** The other thing I'd love to emphasize too, is really utilize the networks that you have, that you're a part of, because I found when I got into university networks were huge. If you go into a field and you're just starting out and you're not really sure about it, how else better to learn, then by engaging with the people that are in that field already have studied in that field have practiced in that field? And that's where going to conventions, I'm not sure for Brandon because oftentimes we went together, but for me, that's where I found it was really great. Was being able to actually talk to graduate level students in Psychology. See what kind of research they're doing. And then connect with them through national groups and different things like that. That's where I feel you're a big chunk of your, your real world learning is going to come from.

**Naomi:** Hm. All right. So be persistent. Give it a try. Don't be afraid. Reach out for help. I think all of those are great things to, to let people know, you know, that it's okay to, to give it a try and pursue your goals. And, you know, the path may not be completely straight. In fact, it's not usually a, a straight line for many people, but, uh, there's ways to modify or change or adapt different subjects to, so that you can participate along with everybody else. Thank you so

much, Chris and Brandon. Um, starting with Chris, is there a place that people could find you if they want to learn more about your work?

**Chris:** Um, I could be found on LinkedIn, uh, also Twitter at CMSchiafone. Those are the two platforms that I use for most, uh, the most for, um, for posting sort of professional type stuff.

**Naomi:** Okay. And Brandon, where can we find you?

**Brandon:** All right. So, um, Twitter is probably the best, uh, it's [twitter.com/unleash Brandon](https://twitter.com/unleash Brandon). Uh, that's the that's probably the, the place I'm the most active. LinkedIn's another one. I also have a website, [BrandonSchiafone.com](https://BrandonSchiafone.com), uh, which definitely needs some updating, but it has a lot of good, uh, relationship-based posts on there that you guys can take a look at it if you like. But definitely Twitter is my primary, most active platform.

**Naomi:** Okay, great. So we'll put those in the show notes in case folks want to check out Brandon and Chris's work in a little bit more detail.

**Brandon:** Thank you.

**Naomi:** Thanks again for your time. And, uh, looking forward to whatever your, wherever your career and your educational paths take you in the future.

**Brandon:** Excellent. Thanks so much for having us.

**Chris:** Thank you for having us.

**Naomi:** And now a message from our sponsor. Discover AMI's collection of podcasts created by and for the blind and partially sighted community. Visit [ami.ca](https://ami.ca) to learn more. AMI entertains, informs, and empowers. And now back to the podcast.

So today I'm introducing Jeffrey Rainey, who is our new Podcast Producer at Living Blind. Welcome to the show, Jeff,

**Jeff:** Thanks Naomi, it's good to be here.

**Naomi:** And it's great to have you. So why don't we start with the basics? Can you tell our listeners a little bit about yourself?

**Jeff:** Sure. My name is Jeffrey Rainey. I live in Aurora, Ontario. I am 27 years old and totally blind. My background is an audio engineering. I've done work in television before with Rogers Community TV and done live sound for various events. I am also a multi-instrumentalist and a lover of comedy.

**Naomi:** And can I ask what instruments you play.

**Jeff:** Piano, drums, flute, saxophone, banjo, steel guitar, and yeah, the half dozen.

**Naomi:** Oh my goodness. You're a, an entire band on your own.

**Jeff:** It is. The only thing I can't do is write. Got to work on it..

**Naomi:** Wow. Oh well. So what got you interested in producing the podcast at BALANCE?

**Jeff:** Well, I was job hunting and saw the opportunity had come up and I am familiar with BALANCE because I've used their services before. When I was going to school downtown, actually I, uh, had an O and M instructor show me how to get from the, uh, St. Andrew's subway station to the college that was on King street. And it was a chance to really step up my role, as a first-time producer. Normally I'm used to being behind the scenes where, and, uh, working with a producer and a host who would, uh, who would have the content and you would edit it and put it together. Whereas now it's more upfront, you know, and more decision-making, planning and logistics, so it's a good challenge. And, uh, I'm really grateful to be here.

**Naomi:** Well, we're grateful to have you. You clearly have a lot of different talents and you're bringing a lot of experience to the show. So do you have a favorite episode that you've listened to or produced so far?

**Jeff:** Well, this is only my second episode or my sophomore episode, if you want to call it that, uh, my first one was last month with Tamisha Edwards. That was probably one of my favorite ones. I would have to say. Uh, favorite one from the early years was the, uh, the cooking one or the parenting one with Jewel. That one was one of my favorites. And I didn't expect to like that one because I, like, I don't, I don't aspire to be a parent anytime soon, but when I listened to it, it was funny. I learned some stuff and it was just a nice, it was just fun to listen to. I also am a big fan of the, uh, Outdoors podcast with Lawrence Gunther and the Travel podcasts, just because those are things I really enjoy doing personally.

**Naomi:** Yeah, I would agree. Those are some of our greatest hits. I mean, I like all the episodes, but back in the day we had a few with Jewel and you're right. Like parenting was not something I knew a lot about, but it was really cool to hear from Jewel what she did to, you know, put her own spin on it. So we've talked a little bit about the past.

What are you most excited for in our upcoming season?

**Jeff:** Well, without giving too much away, we have a few more episodes highlighting, incredible blind people and their careers. Very exciting. And further on down the road, we're looking to do more episodes going back to basics and dealing with daily living and having more panel shows kind of like this one, but more panel shows with a round table of guests throwing uh, different talking points around and getting everyone's take on them. Really looking forward to that. And just hearing from listeners on what they have to say about this podcast.

**Naomi:** Absolutely. I feel like this podcast with Chris and Brandon was a bit of an experiment in that way. I hope you all like it. And you're welcome to tell us about it or give us any feedback you have.

Well, I'm excited to be working with you, Jeff and the rest of the team at the Living Blind podcast and I'm also excited for what the future brings.

That's it for this episode. Thanks for tuning in. I really hope that you enjoyed this episode as much as I enjoy doing these interviews. Special thanks to Christopher and Brandon Schiafone .Our Producer, Jeffrey Rainey, Executive Producer, Debra Gold, and the entire team at BALANCE for Blind Adults. If you liked what you heard today, feel free to subscribe or follow us on whatever platform you're listening on. And don't forget to let us know how we're doing. We're on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter at BALANCE for Blind Adults. You can also email the podcast with any comments, questions, or suggestions you might have at [livingblindpodcast@balancefba.org](mailto:livingblindpodcast@balancefba.org).

For more information about BALANCE for Blind Adults and our programs and services, or to access the show notes or the transcription of this episode, please visit us at [www.balancefba.org](http://www.balancefba.org). I'm Naomi Haslett, and this has been living blind. Thanks for listening.

**Debra:** Hi everyone. It's Debra Gold, Executive Director of BALANCE for Blind Adults. I hope you enjoyed listening to this episode of the Living Blind podcast. Our team is so very pleased to bring you these monthly shows focused



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