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- HEIDI POWELL

In Fitness and in Health

Mesa couple Chris and Heidi Powell make reality TV weight-loss a family affair.

■ BY AMANDA KIPPERT ■ PHOTO BY CARRIE EVANS

B EING COMPLIMENTED ON YOUR BICEPS, AS A WOMAN, can come across one of two ways. Either a) You're really flattered because, why yes, you *have* been doing a lot of curls, or b) Your meathead meter goes off and you figure the next question is going to be something about how you get your glutes so tight.

For Heidi Powell, it was the latter. She *does* have great biceps, but the über-attractive personal trainer - and, at the time, single mom of two - had just gone through a divorce when she interpreted fellow trainer Chris Powell's compliment as a cheesy come-on, and decided she wasn't interested.

"I kind of blew him off, thinking he was just that typical guy," she says. "But knowing him now, he was really trying to be nice."

Little did she know how fateful the opening line from her now-husband would be. This was about a year before Chris was cast as the host of *Extreme Weight Loss*, the popular ABC reality show which finished its third season in September, averaging 3.7 million viewers per episode, and heads into its fourth season next spring. At the time he met Heidi, Chris had just finished living in his car for six months, the after-effect of a prescription painkiller addiction stemming from a sprained elbow. He and Heidi were attending a self-improvement seminar in the Valley, trying to better their lives.

Chris' perseverance didn't allow him to give up - either on his life or his attempt to win over Heidi - despite the cold opening reception. "He said he needed a ride to his car," Heidi says, raising an eyebrow.

"You know how that goes," Chris adds with a wink.

The two talked, and Heidi says it didn't take her long to realize something: "He was different than anyone else I'd ever met in my life. I knew he was going to change the world."

The two went on to marry, settle in Mesa and, before they knew it, realize their joint dream of helping people change their lives for the better. Propelled to stardom by the show, they amassed legions of adoring fans on their weight loss website (reshapethenation.com) and Facebook pages, connecting with the masses in a way that few super-good-looking and buff people can. They say that's because they're not trainers, but "transformation specialists."

"We're a friend, a parent, life coach, stylist, motivator - whatever that person needs in that point in their life to see that they're worthy, we try to give," Heidi says. "We just want them to know that they're extraordinary. People all around them are saying they're not good enough. They're diamonds in the rough and no one even knows because no one's given them a chance."

This may be why, based on an unscientific poll of the show's Facebook page, nobody can seem to get through an episode of *Extreme Weight Loss* without crying. Chris takes people at 500 pounds, convinces them to work their butts off under his intensive but supportive training regimen, and helps them reveal an amazing new body (and life) in 12 months.

Chris says participants become part of their family. "Professionally, it can sometimes be a no-no, but that's the only way people can really change. There has to be trust. It's about unloading emotional weight. When they do

Powell's Power-Promise

ASKED FOR HIS TOP FIVE TIPS FOR STARTING A WEIGHT-LOSS PLAN, Chris Powell doesn't mention typical, broken-record advice like 30 minutes a day of cardio, more whole grains and swapping happy hour for spin class. There was just one thing: **Find and make a commitment.** The catch? Choose a commitment you can do every single day.

"Everybody's made the horrific promise of saying, 'Tomorrow I'm going to wake up and do 45 minutes on the treadmill,'" Powell says. "Sure, they might make it a couple days and Wednesday comes around and they don't keep the promise, and what happens? We have that internal conversation with ourselves that says, 'I knew I couldn't do it.'"

Powell's advice is to **start with an attainable promise.** "It could be an exercise commitment or a nutrition commitment. It could be removing the soda from lunch. It could be moving for five minutes a day. I'm not talking about running around the block - it could be walking in place while watching TV," he says. "This is transformation in a nutshell. **The power is not in the diet and the exercise - the power is all in that promise.**"



fall, which is inevitable, they need to feel safe to say 'I messed up.' If they don't feel safe, like any addict, they're going to hide and the addiction is going to grow."

Chris got his start as a personal trainer in the Valley and gained national attention in 2008, when he helped a Phoenix man named David Smith lose 400 pounds in just over two years. The journey was documented on a TLC show called *650-Pound Virgin*, which led to Chris being cast in *Extreme Weight Loss*. Chris has a degree in exercise science, but says while he understood the mechanics of weight loss, he struggled with the psychological aspects.

When *Extreme Weight Loss* began in 2010, he started bringing participants out to his Arizona home, where Heidi would hold a boot camp for anywhere from two weeks to six months. Chris noticed she was getting through to them in a way he never could.

"Anyone could tell Chris anything and he'd be like, 'I believe you,' whereas I grew up with people dealing with addiction," Heidi says.

"They call her the pit bull and I'm the golden retriever," Chris jokes. "She'd say, 'They're lying to you or they're holding back.' She started to break through some of the barriers these people had."

Throughout the first three seasons, Heidi began to take on a bigger role during filming. Starting with Season 4, airing May 2014, you'll see the couple for the first time as co-hosts.

"It's awesome," Chris says, and Heidi

nods. "We're closer than we've ever been."

The two not only juggle the simultaneous life transformations of 16 participants on the latest season of *Extreme Weight Loss*, but they're also the parents of three kids: Matix, 7 and Marley, 6, from Heidi's first marriage, and their son, Cash, 2. As *PHOENIX* magazine went to press, the couple was expecting a fourth child, a baby girl, on November 16. The power couple also has their own online weight loss program, products, two best-selling books, and blogs, most of which Heidi has taken care of while Chris traveled upwards of nine months out of the year for filming. "I definitely have moments when I say to Chris, 'I can't handle anything else,'" she says.

This year, the entire family relocated to Colorado for the first three months of shooting before moving back to Mesa. Now, the kids travel with them whenever possible, and the couple has a seven-day rule: no more than a week without seeing each other. When Chris is away and Heidi is home, there is constant video communication via Skype. "[When I was] in Peru, our phone bill was something like \$7,000," Chris says. "But it was so worth it."

"Luckily, this isn't work to us," Heidi says. "I never, ever thought I'd be so lucky. I always thought there was a limitation on life. Chris showed me how to dream. He taught me that if you wanted to help people, as long as your intentions are in the right place, you could do whatever you want to."