



Episode 54 – Instincts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there everyone, it's episode 54 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to hear the best conversations about the martial arts, like today's episode all about instinct.

I'm the founder here at whistlekick, but I'm better known as your host, Jeremy Lesniak. whistlekick, in case you don't know, makes the world's best sparring gear and some awesome apparel and accessories for you traditional martial artists. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of you returning fans.

If you're not familiar with our products, you can learn more about them over at whistlekick.com. All of our past podcast episodes, show notes and a lot more are at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Today's episode also has a full transcript with photos and links on the website.

And while you're over there, go ahead and sign up for our newsletter. We offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests.

Now that you know everything you need to know about whistlekick, it's time to talk about today's subject, instinct. The development of instinct is a topic that isn't discussed often within the context of martial arts, but it's certainly something that's important.

Instinct is something we all have. No one is completely void of a sense of instinct, but some people have a stronger sense than others. If you've spent much time as a martial artist, you know that instinct can be very helpful in working with a partner, especially if that work involves free-form movement. Sparring, for example.

To get an idea, or a sense, of what might happen in the future could be one of the most valuable skills someone could develop. The ability to see into the future would be treasured by nearly anyone that had it. Instinct certainly isn't that robust, but it can offer you some similar benefits.

Modern science argues about the existence of a true sixth sense, but there's some research supporting the existence of something beyond the five senses we're used to. Whether that sixth sense works energetically, through chemical receptors we don't fully understand yet or something else doesn't really matter at least for purposes of this show. However you choose to look at it, having a strong sense of instinct is worthwhile, and you should work on it.

One of the greatest challenges to any sort of instinct development lies in modern society. We are constantly told that anything we don't see doesn't exist, and, as I just mentioned, we don't have a full grasp on what this instinct stuff really is. For that reason, not only do people avoid developing their instincts, but they actually fight back against them when they come up. We've all heard someone tell a story that started with I knew I shouldn't have taken that detour, I or I just had a bad feeling about it. This is instinct coming up to warn you, and it's best to not ignore it.



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Why this is so important is pretty obvious, right? If you're able to train your instincts to spot trouble, to read a crowd or a person this can keep you out of harm. On the flip side, it can help you make better choices when presented with options. Depending on how far you believe this sense can go, you can do quite a few things with it.

This is probably where I should offer some sort of disclaimer. When I talk about instinct, I'm not talking about the ability to read minds or anything else in that realm. I've never met anyone that denied that instinct was a real thing, and that's really what I'm working from. Just as you can do exercises to strengthen your eyes, you can learn how to listen better or determine tastes or smells with accuracy, so, too, can you develop your sense of instinct.

The uses for this within the context of martial arts are numerous and hopefully obvious. If we're talking about training, you can anticipate a rogue movement from a partner that maybe someone has thrown and isn't going where it's supposed to. Some people have experienced their own reactions occurring in a way that surprises even them. Perhaps you block a technique without even realizing you were blocking it. Or you throw a beautiful kick that lands exactly where it needed to go, again, without even realizing you wanted to throw a kick there.

Years ago I was taught that this phenomenon was effectively satori, the Buddhist principle of enlightenment. It is in this moment where your martial arts training takes over ñ your mind clears and your techniques just happen. If you've ever had it happen, you certainly know it. It's a shocking occurrence and it's very exciting. I believe that this state is tied strongly to our sense of instinct. It's having a comfort and a faith in one's own innate abilities that allows it to come through.

Some of you out there are probably nodding your head right now. You've either experienced this or you've witnessed it. Some of you might think I've completely lost my mind.

Rather than make this an entire episode convincing you of the existence of these states or throwing around examples of how they can be helpful, let's talk about how to develop your instincts in a way that you may not have considered.

As with any other skill, your sense of instinct requires training. Most of us are, after all, martial artists and we're used to this method of development.

There are lots of things you can do to train your sense of instinct. Within the context of martial arts, performing drills that restrict your other senses can be very valuable, and they're a part of many schools curriculums.

One of my favorites involves two partners standing facing each other, within arm's reach. One of them closes their eyes and the other throws very slow, gentle, open hand attacks. The person with their eyes closed defends against the attacks. With experience, the speed of the attacks can increase quite a bit.



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Now, it's true that this isn't some deep meditative exercise. I don't think it has to be. I believe that the heart of developing a sense of instincts is learning to understand the nuances and subtleties of the people around us. By working this drill you can start to see shadows through your closed eyes, hearing which side of the body is moving when that technique is thrown and a lot more. If you gain enough experience with this drill, you'll start to know where the techniques are coming from but without knowing how you knew and this is exactly what you're working towards.

I'll give you one more martial arts drill you can use. We played this game back in my old dojo when I was living and training in Maine ñ we called it dark alley, I'm sure it exists in other schools but with other names.

So you take the entire class and you split into two lines, facing each other about 6 feet apart. One person is sent to the head of the lines and turns around so they're facing away. The instructor then goes through and selects a random number of people to be attackers and those attackers perform one attack only till you get up to more advanced ranks at least on the person that's gonna walk through the line. So once the attackers are selected the person at the head of the line turns around and walks through and they react to the attacks. It's a fun game and it can even be played in the dark, maybe not full dark but mostly dark.

I mean on the surface, this is simply just another attack and defend drill. If you look deeper, though, or if you've played this game, you know that the attackers tend to give off clues that they've been selected, even if they try really hard not to. They may tense up or their eyes dart around or something like that. If you're a poker player you're used to looking for these sorts of cues and if you look closely and practice, you know anybody can really pick out who these attackers are going to be before they start walking through the lines and those same reactions those same cues exist in the real world in a more malicious sort of environment.

Now, outside of martial arts training there are exercises you can do, too. I think one of the places where a good sense of instinct comes in handy is driving. It's no secret that there are a lot of bad drivers on the road. People do foolish and risky things quite often, and we can't assume that other drivers will remain aware and give us the space we need to remain safe in our vehicles.

When you're driving, take some time to consider other cars on the road ñ where are they, how are they driving, and how are they interacting with the other cars around them? Are they tailgating, driving slowly, weaving a lot these can all be clues to their potential impact on the road. Once you start taking in these clues, try to predict their behavior. We all know the anxiety of wondering if a car is going to pull out in front of us when we're driving. Work on reading the car ñ and trusting your gut.

As with any other skill, if you don't use it, you lose it. Those people that constantly ignore their instincts become desensitized. It's as if there's a voice inside them that they tune out. I bet at least a few of you listening will fall into this category, and my hope is that listening to me today will inspire you to stop



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distrusting your instincts. You wouldn't distrust your eyes or your ears ñ instinct is just another part of you. Trust it, develop it and use it.

I hope you've enjoyed today's discussion on instinct and you've learned something. If you have other ways to develop your own sense, please leave them over on the website. Whether they're martial arts drills or not, let's see if we can compile a list of a few dozen for other people to use as a reference. If you do this sort of training in your martial arts school, tell us about it. We've been receiving a lot more feedback lately, and that's great and personally I really appreciate it.

Head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes and a transcript from today's episode, #54.

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