



Episode 340 – Mr. Tom Fazio | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everyone, thanks for tuning in whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 340. Today, my guest is Mr. Tom Fazio. My name is Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host for this show, I'm the founder at whistlekick and I love the traditional martial arts so I made it my job. It's my job, it's my life; it's what I love. And the entire goal, everything we do at whistlekick is to make your experience as a traditional martial artist that much more empowering, enjoyable, really just get to what you need. Whether that's products like the stuff we have at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) or over at Amazon, things like this podcast, services. You know, we put our weight into Martial Journal, [martialjournal.com](http://martialjournal.com) - great, original, martial arts content. You know, really it's just what do we think needs to be out there so we do it. If you want to sign up for the newsletter to find out about the new stuff that we've got going on or maybe discounts, you know we only send out maybe one or two a month - pretty low key. We never spam you, sell your address or anything silly like that. You can sign up over at the website [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), and while you're over there, check out the show notes, maybe some other episodes. We recently expanded the navigation so it's easier to find episodes based on the style of the practitioner or maybe where they're from, and we'll be adding even more stuff to give you more of a path in to find the episodes that interest you. But let's talk about today's episode.

My guest today is Mr. Tom Fazio and his path through the arts, if you were to write an outline, it almost reads like a classic martial arts film. Now I'm not gonna give away the details cause I want you to be able to experience them in real-time as you're listening to him speak just as I did. I was struck by the way this man articulated himself, the way he expressed his journey. And it was very clear to me, even from the



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beginning of our episode as we talked about the beginning of his martial arts journey, how impactful martial arts was for him and really set a trajectory that I don't think could have gone any other way than the way it has. Let me step out of the way and let's welcome Mr. Tom Fazio to the show. Mr. Fazio, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Tom Fazio:**

Mr. Lesniak, thank you. Thanks for having me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. It's great to have you here. And you know, you're one of those that we had to do a bit of time zone coordination. Here I am, I'm talking to you a bit earlier than normally we would have someone on. And I'm talking to you a bit late in your day because you are on the other side of the world.

**Tom Fazio:**

Indeed. Vietnam - Hội An, Vietnam, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And what is the martial arts landscape in Hội An look like?

**Tom Fazio:**

Well, next to none, I'd have to say here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Really?

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. This is not... I mean there are a few kind of traditional martial arts in Vietnam but this city is really kind of largely expat-oriented with a large floating population. You know, the local population here is... Yeah. There just isn't much of a martial arts community, you know. There's a few people trying to start some things up, some Thai boxing gyms and things like that but you know. To put things in perspective, they got their first proper, you know, exercise gym probably about six months ago, a year ago. So they're just starting off even on that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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And what's the population?

**Tom Fazio:**

It's... You know, I'm not actually sure what the standing population is. They get a massive... I mean this is considered one of the, I think, you know over the last six months or year, I think it's held the 14th spot in, you know, world's best destinations for you know, small cities or towns or something like that. So...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So it's a good size.

**Tom Fazio:**

It gets a ton of tourism but it doesn't have a large permanent population. You know, if I had to guess it's probably less than a half a million people for sure, maybe only a couple hundred thousand, at most, for static population. But then it gets a ton of tourism [04:54](#) millions of tourists.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. And to compare that here in the U.S., try to find a town with 20,000 people that doesn't have a martial arts school and maybe more than one, and a gym or seven.

**Tom Fazio:**

Absolutely. I know, it's quite different.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What brought you to Vietnam?

**Tom Fazio:**

Right. Well I've been living in China for the last decade plus - off and on, at least - a bit about 10 years, needed to get out of there. My girlfriend and I had been working and living there for quite some time and it just started to weigh on us eventually. And we both built up relatively successful businesses in our own domains and it was really much more of a lifestyle choice to leave Shanghai and go someplace. This wasn't kind of a, you know, go-to and set up a base decision. It was more of a transitional decision that is wound up lasting a little longer than expected. But we're taking this opportunity and I'm fully focusing, at least my own time, on getting back to basics with my own training and you know, taking business essentially fully remote. I've been teaching and coaching for the last 10 years in China and so this is kind of my attempt



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to part from direct coaching and move my business not online per say but at least to more remote coaching type of process.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I mean of course, as an entrepreneur, I've done my fair amount of research on the lesser expensive places that you can live as you start a business, and Vietnam is quite up there. There's a very strong entrepreneurial community especially expats from the United States. Have you bumped into folks doing that?

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah, it's got a fair kind of digital known ad footprint. Hoi An, I would not say has a strong influence, much more so on the bigger cities. But the work that we're trying to do is not really associated with being in Vietnam. Most of my clients are really spread out around the world if not back in China, still. So yeah. It's

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Alright. Gives us a little bit of context for where you are now but let's roll back in time a little bit. Obviously, we're here to talk about martial arts and how martial arts fits into your life. So let's talk about how martial arts entered your life.

**Tom Fazio:**

Sure. So I was probably about 10 years old and was, you know, kind of your classic... Well back in the day, we would have said more Karate Kid type of situation. I had a childhood [07:57](#), you know? I think a lot of us kind of had those experiences when we were young. And you know, there was a guy in my neighborhood and it an unavoidable situation where kind of everyday walking home from the bus drop-off. And there was a guy who's just kind of a couple years older, much larger, and just were kind of pestering but anybody smaller than himself, walking back. It wasn't anything too tragic but it... You know, I remember the feelings of, I suppose helplessness, you know, a few times that came up and just realizing that you know, I didn't have the strength or the power to even manage myself. And it was... Yeah, it was a lot to deal with. At that time, it's your whole world and it hits you pretty hard. So I remember one day getting home and telling my father, you know... I need to learn --- Well [08:47](#) about Karate back then, you know. That era sounds like oh, you know, I gotta learn Karate to defend myself. So before long, I was in a Karate class and that was the beginning of my journey that's took me too many different martial arts and all around the world, I suppose, overtime.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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And did your exchanges with that bully changed? Did it ever come to blows? Did the confidence you gained negate the need for any of that?

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. That's a great question and to... yes, to the last question of sorts. And it was one of those weird turn of events where the bullying lasted a while and then I started training intensively. And I remember having a focus and my instructor recognizing that at the time and giving me a slightly more aggressive training than some of the other kids and thought I could take it. But it was actually really... Looking back, it was pretty aggressive training for a 10-year old at the time. But in one year, I'd made good progress and was really focused and you know. So I took a little bit of abuse but he wound up moving away after that [10:02](#). And I kept going for a while longer but with that, the pressure started to weigh in and you know, I felt a little bit more comfortable and slacked off for maybe a year or two. And then I decided to take martial arts up more seriously again through another system in school. But I remember seeing him a few years later and at that time, I was, you know, at least three or four years older and so was he, and it was, I think at a gymnasium, a racquetball court and we just crossed paths. And I don't know if he recognized me but it was one of those feelings where I... You know, all the ill will that I had for the guy and maybe anger and what have you, it just kind of melted away. I felt like I understood him in that moment. I just, you know, it was a lot to kind of let go. Because I realized at the time, the guy, I think he had a troubled childhood and probably didn't know really what to do with himself and hadn't matured. And that time when we made eye contact, it was just... I felt like I was looking at somebody that really had lost his center and lost his control. And at that point, I gained a lot more confidence and the ability to handle myself, at least, so a lot shifted. But it was a nice moment where it didn't need to go to a point of physical confrontation. It was much more about understanding, I think.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How old were you then?

**Tom Fazio:**

Early to mid-teens? If I had to guess, it was probably around 13, 14 years old or something like that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. You know, what you're describing is certainly not something that is uncommon but certainly uncommon for a young man at that age. You know, I don't have to tell you. The majority of the people listening will understand, of course, that, you know, you start getting into your teens and hormones and here you are, you're seeing your bully and you've got a bit more skill and confidence. And your response, rather than... even just to posture, to express that confidence physically, but rather to just what sounds



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like a tremendous amount of compassion, a level of compassion that I think very few people ever get to in their adult lives and in your early teens.

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. I think you're... I appreciate. I think you're giving me a lot of credit. I'm not really sure, you know. I'm just, it was one of those moments where, you know, things kind of have come into focus and make sense and I can't say that it was in any conscious act of the will to forgive the guy or to move on. It was just kind of release. It's just kind of a sense of understanding. I mean, you know, I've had my fair share of bad decisions and I've done plenty of stupid things in my lifetime, as well. But it was just one of those moments where you kind of understand, I guess. Certainly, I wish that I could have handled most of my troubles in life with a similar fashion. But yeah, as far as my first experience, it definitely... You know, it gave perspective, I think. And one of the things that I think that's difficult and for most people, that's... They initiate martial arts training and take it seriously as there's... there's certainly a lot of machismo and ego involved in that story but I think that... Maybe you're right, perhaps, that it gave insight into the fact that time does a lot of funny things to our perceptions and our values. A lot of times we'll get heated and I've had a lot, certainly a lot, of situations where we get heated in the moment. And you know, I've had plenty of decisions where I've made very rash decisions and stuff that I regret after [14:11](#) But you know, when you got that distance and that time to kind of process things and see things with a bit less emotion involved, a lot of clarity can arise. Yeah, it's just one of those moments, I guess.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So that's what got you in the martial arts. What kept you?

**Tom Fazio:**

Ah, another great question. I tend to say that that's, for every martial artist, that tends to be two big questions and those were kind of it. Yeah. So what kept me was... You know, after a few years, and I know you got very extensive background yourself, there comes a point where you realize you... the reasons that you got into it are no longer needed. I mean it doesn't take long to learn it. If you have decent instruction and your conscientious training, it doesn't take long to learn how to fight. Now obviously, you know, that is context-dependent and to varying degrees and has a lot to do with the severity of the situation. But to handle yourself in most, at least [15:17](#) if not most altercations in situations, you know, a few years of training, four to six years, is more than enough to become proficient. But I don't think it's enough to keep you in the game if you're serious about it... So what kept me? There was a big transition, I'd say in my later high school years and early university years. I studied philosophy and religion as a major in college and there was a real convergence between what I was studying there and my training. And certainly, my study of Eastern religions and philosophy, and I realized martial arts had a lot more to do with life, you know with the capital L, than anything else. And it was a phenomenal framework from which to view the rest of your experience and the rest of life. And the better that I got and the more that I studied, I realized I just...





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the things that I was practicing weren't... you know, it wasn't isolated external domain. It was actually studying substance of life itself and the tools in martial arts. I think that at its core, martial arts is fundamentally about conflict resolution and dealing with the relationship between momentary insight and, you know, at least in terms of real conflict, the moment between life and death and understanding the fleeting aspects of life and... Yeah. I would just say that these things converge in a way to where I... The physical training and philosophical training in the martial arts converge with what I was essentially trying to understand in a larger spectrum around philosophy, in life, and how to do something meaningful with my time. And no matter where I look at, I couldn't find fault with training, you know? I think a lot of us try to find something meaningful to do in life but we don't often ask the question what can we stop doing and still say that we're doing things that are meaningful. And martial arts has always fallen into that category where I could conclusively say if I stop doing this, it's quite likely life will not be as meaningful for me. It creates a great deal of relevance and perspective and confidence and, you know, conditioning and a lot of the stuff that I think empowers us to live a meaningful life. So... I'm ranting a little bit here but that's kind of the essence of it, I guess - what kept me in it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Makes sense and certainly no real surprises there - your journey while unique and your own at the same time parallels, I think, the majority of martial artists that start for one reason and stay for a different reason. And that different reason tends to be far more broad, far more internal -

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

- than the generally external reasons that people will start.

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now you said you relocated from Shanghai so I'm going to guess that you are a Chinese martial artist - that's not the right terminology - a Chinese martial arts practitioner. There we go. Am I right?

**Tom Fazio:**

Right. Well, no.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay.

**Tom Fazio:**

Kind of no. I mean that's where things get maybe a little bit more complicated. I'm not [18:51](#) martial arts. My early training, as I mentioned, started with Karate back in the States but then I wound up predominantly with Korean martial arts for at least a decade. And I got, you know, ranks and ITF Taekwondo, Shin Moo Hapkido, Moo Sul Kwan Martial Arts which is kind of a hybrid with few different Korean martial arts. And so that was my central focus for quite a long time. I taught it for many years, I competed for many years. And that was... It gained me a phenomenal foundation, I think, and understanding for martial arts in general. And I was very fortunate to train with exceptional, absolutely exceptional, world-class martial artist through my earlier years. And after college, you know I had a talk with my instructor and mentor, Master Roberto Roena at the time, to where he kind of... It was an odd conversation. I always saw him as an absolute inspiration, an extreme mentor with stuff that he could do in his fifties would blow most 20-year olds away in terms of his physicality and performance, and always, I mean, unbelievable inspiring. But he kind of set me free at that point; he said I don't have anything else to teach you. And so I said okay and I, you know, I laid it out and I was like do I need to compete? Do I need to fight more? I mean, do I need to... you know, whatever you think. I mean I'm ready to take things farther. And he left it at that and so I said well, I guess I'm gonna go back to the origin of things. And so I moved to China and started practicing Shaolin Kung Fu. And that started kind of at least a decade long of travel and study under different Chinese masters and different systems. So I said, you know, I studied at few different places - in China, in Thailand, in Hong Kong - and it was challenging to find people that would work with me in the way that I wanted to progress. I felt a pretty substantial foundation a lot of classical instructors don't want. Neither they don't understand that all martial arts have a very similar essence and you know, move body mechanics and movement mechanics are... you know, we're all human and there's something that makes us all very similar when it comes to those things. But if you look for, you know, Chinese classical instruction, very rarely can they understand that there's a lot of crossovers for some of these. So that was challenging - to find a teacher that would not essentially put me in a horse stance for another few years. But I was lucky, I found phenomenal teachers that I was able to study some classical Chinese weapons - the chain whips, the meteor hammers, the rope arts - you know, I did that for at least a few years. And then I went back and studied some of the other classical Kung Fu weapons; trained in Thai boxing and a little bit of MMA and Jiu Jitsu and Filipino boxing and Kali, and Tai Chi, Baji, I mean I could list off a whole bunch of different things. I wouldn't say that any of them were to the core of the arts but I was fortunate to find exceptional instructors who were willing to take me where I was and work with me privately to essentially assimilate their skill set without needing to compromise my background and my base which I feel very grateful for. So yeah, it's a bit complex. I mean I'd say what I'd been teaching for the last at least 10 years now has been very much a hybrid system that doesn't really look like too many of the things that I've trained in their purity but it draws from a lot of these other systems as a base. And then tried to find a happy medium between self-defense and strong foundational, you know, movement; you know, just movement elements, I supposed.





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

A lot of what you're talking about, you know, if we kinda distilled it off would make pretty good plot for a martial arts film. You train and then your instructor says I have nothing left to teach you and sends you out into the world and you go to China and you bounce around and masters don't want to take you on and you finally find one, and, you know. Here, from what you're describing, you're kind of in that third act where you've collected your own elements and now you're teaching your own style, if you will, and the circle repeats itself. But I want to go back to your instructor releasing you.

**Tom Fazio:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Because that's something that, you know, it's cliché in the movies but it's absolutely not in the traditional arts at least in my experience. It's something that, you know, the ego --- and the subject of ego in martial arts is one that is batted about frequently especially here on the show. But that says a lot about your instructor.

**Tom Fazio:**

No doubt.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That you were working with. Can you tell us? Because most of us are never going to experience that - being sent off to gain new knowledge from someone else. Can you tell us what that was like?

**Tom Fazio:**

Well it was... it was terrible at the time. I mean it was... one of those experiences where, you know, I felt like I was a... I mean you know, despite the fact that my instructors are... He was just an absolutely wonderful guy and just a monster on the mats and in the ring. I mean, phenomenally, phenomenally gifted - you know, rank and world champion in kickboxing and golden gloves champ and rank in Jiu Jitsu and master of... highly ranked master of both ITF and WTF Taekwondo. I mean he's trained in so many things and his proficiency and skill. And all of these things was absolutely extraordinary. And, you know, without making this a long session about some of the insights and skills that he was able to specifically relay, he has... It was one of those situations where he was an absolutely gifted mover and had a phenomenal intuition and you know, he was also a world recognized salsa dance. Sometimes, he would put on salsa music while we would fight and he would talk to us about rhythm and timing, and get us to essentially,



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you know, listen and move with certain beats. All these kinds of things just to try to add insight and timing and rhythm to the game and... His depth of knowledge was extraordinary but he was also not what I would consider... I don't know how to say this subtly. He wasn't what I would consider an intellectual martial artist. Not that he didn't have an incredibly deep understanding of martial arts but he was in no way academic about his training or his skill sets. And a lot of the things that he could do were street. Like they were old school, dirty street, and his understanding like... You know, I've trained with... In terms of world-class martial artists, I mean dozens and dozens around the world, guys that, I mean, are mind-blowing in their talent. And he was up there with one or two guys that when you train with him, when you move with him, it's frightening sometimes. Because you feel a power and a capability that you almost never feel around another human being. I mean, it's like a wild animal in some cases. And then you see that glow in his eyes and the power in his movements, and it was just one of those things. When he said I don't have anything else to teach you, I never took that as you can't learn more from me. But what I took that as there's nothing that we can formalize, there's nothing that I have, technically, that I can give you. I mean he's a type of guy that if you spend time around him, his presence and his movement and his ability to, you know, deal with just interesting problems that crop up in fighting scenarios, and his ability to move in ways - he doesn't fully... he hasn't been taught but he's learned. And he's taken those things on and that stuff is impossible to pass on unless you spend a great deal of time just analyzing, breaking down movements and studying, just spending a lot of time studying the arts. So I really took it much more as you know I've taught you as much as I can within these systems but, you know, that's kind of where it's at. But you know, that being said, he kind of adopted me. I mean I was with him for about four years, at my college years. We met my freshman year as he was associated with the Taekwondo club at the time and he would be coming up for workshops and seminars through the school that was essentially running that club. And I was a, you know, I came from another system - I came from Moo Sul Kwan at the time. I was ranked at the time as a black belt and there was one workshop where he came up to me afterwards and he asked me who I was training with and studying with and he said, look. He was like, I know where you're at. I know, I can say for a fact that who you're training with right now cannot give you what I can give you. And I know it's a tough decision to consider changing teachers and schools but he was like, you need to consider this. I can take you where your school cannot. And he could just tell from the technique. And that was an incredibly difficult decision. It took me at least six months to really think through because I felt loyal to my school but he was right. I mean, he was 100% right that... Very few people could teach what he could teach and he was generous for that. I was very fortunate to be able to work with him.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I wanna ask for just a little bit more on this subject then we'll move on.

**Tom Fazio:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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When I asked you initially what it was like to be sent off to be released, the first word you used was it was terrible.

**Tom Fazio:**

Okay. Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So I kinda wanna just get into a bit of the emotion of that. Because here, you know, you've given us more context for your relationship with this man; how much esteem you hold him and his skill. And the challenging decision that you went through to start working with him and how important that was.

**Tom Fazio:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And then to have to move on. Bring us inside your head, if you will, in that moment.

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. I mean, you know, in retrospect, it was a tremendous life lesson but you know, there's that classical Buddhist quote that is kind of... It's ironic and it's difficult for a lot of people practicing. I'm not a Buddhist or anything, you know, particular by name. But there's a classical paradox at least in Buddhism where they say, you know, if you find a Buddha on the road, kill him. And this is their quote within Buddhism, you know, not outside of that. So it's particularly ironic and difficult for some people to fully embrace but it was that moment. I mean it was that moment where... you know, in giving me essentially that... I don't know. I could've stayed and trained with him but I think that to a certain extent, he acknowledged that, you know, it might be better for me to explore or learn what I could elsewhere. But it's that moment where you hold somebody in great esteem and you come to realize not that he can't give you more but that it's your time to make that... you know, to become a light for yourself. And it's one of those moments that I think... I mean I'm sure that you can understand this - anybody that has really been committed to a craft of any kind for a very long time, there comes a moment where you have to be willing to kill your mentor or kill, you know, kill that vision you have for the good or the great or the perfect or, you know, the light that's been feeding you. It's important sometimes that you destroy that so that you can find that in yourselves. And it really became that kind of transition for me. It was difficult, it was challenging, it was painful because it left me in the dark for a while but at the same time it made me realize that for the next, you know, 10, 15 years that I might find phenomenal guidance and lights but they were not mine to keep, you know. They were mine to see, to appreciate, to inculcate or take on and... But fundamentally, and I



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think this is very much the spirit of the martial arts, if you ever need to apply what you're learning, you're alone. I mean there's a real honesty about that process. If you ever have to fight, if you're ever in a ring, if you're even on the street, no belt matters, no instructor matters. It's that point where you need to be that light for yourself and see with clear eyes and not be clouded or delusional and... Yeah, you know. So it's just, it's complex in that moment because it was a difficult realization that I wouldn't be going farther with my mentor. But at the same time, it paved the way for me to make my own, so.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. Yeah. I get it. I get it and I don't know that everyone out there is going to get it but I suspect there are a lot of nodding heads right now. When you reflect on your time as far training, I'm sure there are a lot of stories that come up, a lot of things, a lot of anecdotes or funny moments, difficult moments that you could tell us. But if I ask you for your favorite story from your time training, what would that be?

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. That is not easy. Sorry, not to pause for too long here just uh...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, no. Take your time.

**Tom Fazio:**

I mean I can say, you know, without a doubt that the most intense and memorable experiences that I had were with Shaolin monks [33:56](#) and it wasn't just one. I've had three that were extraordinarily inspiring for me. One that taught me the chain whip and Chi Gong; one that taught me, well, I guess further training in the chain whip but also some of the other weapons, traditional Shaolin and foundations of Shaolin; and then another one who is probably the rightful heir, an abbot, of the Shaolin Temple who... the training with him was much more passive but he was one of the most inspiring figures that I've ever met. So yeah, I'll give you the option. Do you want kind of an inspiring, bizarre martial arts story or one that was more radiate training oriented?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The latter.

**Tom Fazio:**

The latter. So ---



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you're gonna make me pick.

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. So, yeah. This is one of the stories that I recount a little bit in my book. But when I was at my first training academy for Shaolin, I was in the north of China in Jilin province. We're probably an hour outside of the nearest cities, we were in the countryside in this training center, and this was abnormal. I mean the proper Shaolin Temple's in Henan But I had found this school and it seemed interesting and it was... they were proper Shaolin monks who were teaching and training there. And the whole thing sounded quite legitimate and that was the beginning of me learning a lot about China in terms of nothing is ever 100% legitimate in China. There's quite a lot of... yeah. Kind of your vision of the old, you know, Chinese sage with the white eyebrows who will teach you the [35:54](#) lessons. This still exists but there is an awful lot of the other as well. I mean there's not a lot of purity in that. It's a great place to go to have your ideals crushed but also still learn something really real about life in martial arts. Anyway, so this academy, there was one instructor, Master [36:19](#) who was... He was probably, you know, around 30 or early 30's at the time but his skill was absolutely extraordinary. I was 23 and the other monks that were teaching in the school were also young - between probably 25 and 30 years old. That being said, these guys start at the age of five and they train six hours a day, everyday for 15 years. So people that, you know, that train in the west and train as weekend warriors or even if they're serious to train a couple hours a day, you know, four or five days a week, they don't understand how little it can compare to that kind of... It just... this immersive indoctrination into a system like that. And the things that these guys can do is mind-blowing. I've always considered myself kind of a natural athlete and I've been quick to learn most of the things that I've taken on. But a lot of things you cannot replicate that these guys do with anything less than absolute lifetime commitment. So anyway, this guy was extraordinary. You know, there's be other monks there and we'd see him from time to time where he's very quiet. He was brought in to teach Chi Gong rather than any of the physical forms. But he was so capable that, you know, some of the monks would be messing around or practicing weapons and they'd toss the weapon at him and occasionally would even be... he wouldn't even be necessarily watching what was going on or paying attention. But you know, the staff would come into, you know, his peripheral vision. He'd grab it and within 3-5 seconds, he'd be whipping it around like it was... just with skill that was unfathomable. So that was the one side of it. The other side of it was his Chi Gong training was quite advanced - was very advanced. We would get up at 5 am in the morning to get a little bit warmed up and we'd be practicing, you know, golden belt Chi Gong in this training hall in freezing conditions. And it was extremely difficult and grueling training. On top, we were training 6 hours a day to it was grueling on top of that hour and standing and holding, you know, "Golden Belt". But he would walk by us in the morning and from 6, 7 feet away, you would feel the heat, and the energy emanating from his body. And it was bitter cold and you would feel the wave of heat coming from him. You know, when your eyes were closed, you're gonna be practicing and you come up in your heat, test your chi and your breathing capacity by literally punching you in the stomach. You know, you're not prepared, you're not thinking about it but to test whether or not there's enough proper... I'm not sure the right way to describe that but I suppose compression in the lower abdomen. It's not like





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you're tensed in any way, shape or form but that type of training swells and hardens parts of the body in odd ways. So yeah, I was able to bond with him and, you know, he became my first chain whip instructor. He wasn't supposed to take on any students outside of this so he, you know, he said he'd train me in the forest privately, away from the group. And so we would kind of escape once in a while and go out to the hills and, you know, he gave me my first chain weapon. You know, he did it out with ribbons and all this stuff and, you know, saw the end of it off, which I remember. And I was a little bit disappointed. I was like, whoa, you know, why'd you ruin it? And he just, you know, we didn't communicate very well at the time, my Chinese was terrible at the time. All he did was kind of bring the what was left of the end of the rope, sorry, the end of the chain whip to his eye, insinuating, you know... it kind of like the Christmas story quote like, you know, you poke your eye out, kid - this kind of thing. So he does that and I was like, okay. And then he said just, you know, he gave me the two fingers towards his eye as if you know, he just said watch me. And this was my first initiation in the Shaolin training and they don't coach you from the ground up. They kind of... they show you something that you just are supposed to pick up, I don't know, through intuition. But he did a few movements, you know, at the time. I mean I now... I'm very familiar with what's going but at the time, I had no idea what he was doing. A few movements that were as fast as lightning with his fist, he sprinted across the forest with, you know, four steps, leapt up six feet in the air, flattened out, hovered for, you know, a second or two and then the chain whip fires out of his hand. And then he starts spinning it and I couldn't track the whip, I couldn't track even the ribbon that was attached to it which was supposed to give you a spot. And then, you know, he was like, he handed it to me and he said okay, now you do. And I was like... It was humbling to say the least. It was humiliating to a certain extent but we grew from there. He was patient with me and I tried my best to take it on and I learned with him for a while. But that was my first experience with the chain whip and it was really getting thrown in the deep end. But he was just... it was just like watching a wild animal again who, with his ability, was extraordinary. But take that to the next level, what really made it profound was that his Chi Gong was on next level stuff. So after a couple of weeks, I was... the training was so severe. It was so severe that, you know, the first week to two weeks, I thought I was gonna have to go to the hospital because I couldn't feel my legs at certain days. One or two days, we're having this training because I literally couldn't get out of bed and walk. And my tolerance for pain is not bad. I mean I consider myself relatively okay when it comes to bearing a good portion and I was at the total brink of destruction. So this was on-going and, you know, there was a lot that we suffered through but there was one thing I couldn't kick which I was starting to accumulate a lot of heat in my lower back. And it was... what it would be especially painful after 20, 30 minutes of standing meditation with the arms extended and I just couldn't concentrate. I was just like, my back was aching and my frame was shaking. And to a certain extent, that happens with the training, we have to stick through it. But it was really... I had to talk to him. And so he, you know, he understood and he laid down. And he said, well why don't you lay down for a second? And so he'd, you know, touch a few points in my back and he was like, what did you do? And I was like, I don't know. And he's like, well you're injured; you're injured right here. And I was like, I don't think so. And he pushed with his finger and I, you know, I held in pain and I was like okay, I guess I'm injured. And I mean he could feel it without, you know, really doing anything too in-depth. And he said just relax for a minute. And so he started to move his hand across my back and within a few seconds they got hot and a few more seconds they got hotter. And after, you know, 30 seconds to a minute, it felt like there were irons on my back. And there was no physical contact. There was, you know, space between his palms and my back - I can tell that clearly. But it was





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absolute burning and just fire coming from his hands. And then he said, you know, get some good rest tonight, you'll be fine tomorrow. And I woke up the next morning and I was pain-free; I'm completely pain-free all through my back. So yeah, this guy was... he was extraordinary. I mean his demonstration, everybody, including myself but all the teachers too, everybody that came school had to do a demonstration on day one of their skill. To put things in perspective, he just went and picked up two bricks from the field and he set them on a, you know, the edge of the table. And we've all... I mean most people that had been in martial arts have done some brick breaking and certainly done supportive brick breaking but he sat these bricks on the edge of the table with no supports, no hand pressing on them, and he literally sliced the edge off the other half of the brick remains on the table, undisturbed. And everybody just kinda said, okay so this is the new guy. That was... He's an inspiring martial artist.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That word sounds like it doesn't do him justice.

**Tom Fazio:**

It might not. It might not - inspiring, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I mean you lived it and, you know, when stories like this come up - stories that might be a bit difficult for listeners to believe, you know my position here, I don't... I mean I've seen crazy stuff so I'm pretty open to just about anything. I've never seen someone handle a brick the way you're explaining it but

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

To me, the important is not so much whether or not it happened. It's that it... you saw it happen, you believe it happened. It's part of you and your story as a martial artist, and that's powerful. I mean that's mind-blowing stuff.

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah, yeah. I mean I tend to be very... I mean to be honest with you, I don't often talk about too many of the stories or experiences I've had and when I teach, I really focus on practical pragmatic aspects of training - structural aspects, fighting - but, you know, for me, I've been lucky to see some of these things but it's difficult to communicate sometimes because there's no way of avoiding and seeming



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esoteric, mystical, if not you know, completely fabricated. So, you know, if there are martial artists that had been in a game a while, you tend to find some open-mindedness around it or mystics might be open-minded but... yeah. Well let me give you one more real quick.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, please.

**Tom Fazio:**

Yeah. So a couple of years ago, and this was a pure fluke of luck, I happen to have a friend whose father was a Chinese, what do we call, politician of sort but he had a high position within the Henan government. And in high martial arts, there is usually a very strong connection between politics and martial arts. It's always been there in martial arts or the history of China which is, you know, fascinating thing itself. But because of this, we were able to get, my friend and I, an invitation to the Shaolin Monastery which is this secluded mountain top temple that you have to hike, you have to take, first of all, a cable car from the Shaolin Temple region where there are tens of thousands of students practicing across dozens of fields and you see those, just these fields of, you know, a thousand students at once practicing and all that stuff is down in the base of the Shaolin Temples. And they all train in a very standardized modern Shaolin. But to get to this other temple, you have to, you know, take a cable car for an hour and then you have to hike through the mountains for three hours and then you have to have an invitation to get through the doors. So you don't just go and get in. We were extremely lucky to be able to go in and meet a man named Shi De Jian who... you can find some clips of the guy online dancing on tops of these rooftops atop his cave. He still lives in a cave after 50 years, 45, I think... 45, 50 years, where he is doing his patterns and techniques, essentially dancing on, you know, one meter wide, slanted rooftop that looks impressive when you see it on video. But when I was there, looking at the edge of this thing, you're looking down onto mists that is literally 100+, if not 200 meters down. I mean hundred of feet, we're talking about, straight down and there is nothing that would catch your fall on the other side. TO which, you know, I asked him one time why do you train on this? And he just said, because if I make a mistake, I die so I don't make a mistake. He said, when you do your forms, you stand on the ground but my toes grip the ground. I'm holding the earth with my toes. You know, it's for dear life most of the time. But so when we were able to meet Shi De Jian, the story behind this guy is such that he's probably the likely true heir of the Shaolin Temple in terms of being the... what should be the abbot in terms of lineage. But there was a lot of politics that went on and he wound up essentially reconstructing this old dilapidated monastery as a dying wish of its old master that took him, you know, 20-30 years or something like this of daily construction. With all of his other monks carrying concrete blocks at the mountain, constructing the whole thing, and it's absolutely a pristine, beautiful work of art. There was a renounced Swiss architect that helped weigh in and another Chinese architects so it was... I mean it was absolutely a fantasy land. But when we met him, we walked into, essentially, it was a meditation hall if not a conference hall but it was a giant room that probably was something like a basketball court plus. And there were artifacts in here and, you know, a literally a crystal Buddhist. I mean there must have been tens, if not hundreds of millions, worth of artifacts that people had given him that had been of gold and I mean pure, like really pure,



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artifacts that had been there for hundreds and hundreds of years. And they're just all over the place. And so he's living in this and he's being, you know, served by people that just want to come and be with him and support him. But so we got to talk with him when we first arrived and, you know, which was another humbling experience, but we talked about meditation for a little bit and then he asked me to do a physical demonstration which is not what you want to hear from somebody of his caliber.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No.

**Tom Fazio:**

You know, there's one technique in Shaolin which you will see in every Shaolin or Wushu form which is essentially stomping the ground, right? And it's often accompanied by a circular movement where one at the back of the fist goes into the other palm. And it has a lot of potential translations but at higher levels, one of the translations, essentially, this is about energy transference. And that's what you hear from a lot of people, right? So I know the technique but I know it as somebody who studied it from outside the system and kind of picked up the form as needed and demonstrated a few kicks and other techniques as he asked for them. So I do this technique and I stomped the ground and I do my technique and he just kind of looks at me and he's like, mmm, okay. But he's like, but uhm, watch me. And so he does the same thing and he stomped the ground, and to create a little bit of context, this was an entirely concrete infrastructure. It was stoned for floor; it was a combination of like mountain bedrock, stone and marble. I mean this thing was built to withstand, you know, the worst kind of earthquake, probably. It was just an incredibly built building. He stomped the ground and the floor shook. And you could feel the energy transmission. And it was like, you know when something eerie happens and the hair on your arms stands up, the back of your neck stands up, and just fire and energy. It was one of the most extraordinary things I have ever seen and I would not have believed it if I didn't see it. But he just looked at me and he said, when you stomp the ground, you kick the ground. He said, when I stomp, my energy goes everywhere. And you're just like... okay. So we sat down and we talked for a few more minutes about meditation and a few minutes later, somebody comes up who looks totally disheveled and nervous and starts pouring tea for us and for us and Shi De Jian just starts laughing. And he says, he sleeps downstairs. Though we found out later, there's at least three meters of bedrock and concrete underneath this thing. So he stomps so hard that this guy sleeping beneath the mountain, essentially, was awoken by this and came up in a panic to try to, you know, keep his master happy. But that was the first 20 minutes of the week. And over the course of the next week, you know, he just... yeah. Just being in his presence, being able to see the way that he moved and, you know, his Kung Fu looked nothing like what it does at the base of the mountain; it was absolute pristine. Like you would know after so long that when you see a [54:07](#) martial artist is that the arts and forms are more modernized or that are one or two or three steps removed from the true practitioner or, you know, the master that got his hands dirty. The forms start to take on longer techniques, right? So you start to extend from your frame a little bit more and you start to wind up with much more aesthetic-looking techniques, you wind up with longer stance, deeper stances, full extension of the technique; you wind up, in some cases, rigid or locked out techniques. But his mechanics look much



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more like what you would see possibly in a Krav Maga or studio where there was a deep understanding of the application of these tools and it looked like a combination between dance and... Well, the certain applications of Krav Maga but it was very... How to say? It was rooted but elegant and fluid. It looked absolutely nothing like current Wushu, modern Wushu and other types of martial arts. But the diplomat that we were with has said that, you know, the government is trying to protect this guy, Shi De Jian because there was slightly... it's likely that real Shaolin might die with him. That, you know, the real way that everybody practices it and teach it now, at least at the base of the mountain and throughout the world, is much more modernized. But there's something very pure about his practice so... yeah. Anyway, that could easily become an hour plus recount a lot of the crazy, crazy things that he was able to do but I just wanted to share a little bit, I guess.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Super cool stuff. Let's bring it back to you. What's going on for you? Let's start there. You alluded at the beginning of our conversation to coaching others and the work that you do online, remotely - I'm kinda making a mishmash of some of your words. But let's tell folks what you've got going on and what they might be interested in there.

### **Tom Fazio:**

Sure. So... Yeah, it's a few things. I mean, to give you a little bit of context, so over the last maybe 8 years or so, I put out a few things. One of the things that I put a lot of my time into is my own soft weapon system which is an amalgam of the soft weapons training I did in the Shaolin monks. You know, kind of Indonesian Sarong fighting and kind of Hapkido and classical Kung Fu, that kind of transitions and applications with soft weapons and ropes and things. I've been fortunate to have, again, a wide range of instruction with soft weapons but it's led to a very eclectic and, in my mind, comprehensive approach in system. So in terms of my own emphasis in martial arts, that was a big one. I've put a lot into that; I had DVDs on the topics that I've put out. And so the soft weapons is something I would consider myself, I guess, an expert in. I think that I've never seen a more comprehensive system or approach for soft weapon than I what I deal with, and that's become a very central part of my own training I still carry on. It's a deep passion for me. I don't get to teach it directly to many people because of the time commitments involved. But I communicate with people all around the world that are studying soft weapons and object manipulation employ in these things that we're trying to go deeper into that kind of stuff. For the martial arts stuff, I haven't taught in the last year. In Shanghai, I've had a base of students that... they were with me often, you know. The longest one's for at least five, six years in Shanghai. But I've been teaching my own system in Shanghai for at least a decade and yeah. I don't know if I want to go into too much detail with that but I would say that it's very much based on sounds structural movement, sound bio-mechanics; it's looking at deeper elements of movement - you know, analysis of anatomy in a deep way. And so it has a strong structural foundation but a lot of it is stress simulations and in essentially trying to get the mind to open up in different ways so that we can access different parts of ourselves under pressure. So that was a lot of the stuff in terms of the martial arts. And you know, there's a heavy base of Hapkido manipulations and joint locks and throws and [58:53](#) and those things. There's influence from both ITF



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Taekwondo and Kung Fu roots in terms of my striking techniques and some of the foundations that I teach which are not formal in terms of patterns but I do have some essential foundations for... that I believe is essentially teach force application through key vectors. Which is a slightly different approach for many. And there are a few formal techniques but a lot of it is essentially understanding body mechanics, bio-mechanics, and trying to refine those kicking techniques heavily influenced by Taekwondo, Hapkido, little bit of Kung Fu. But yeah, so I teach, you know, those techniques. The applications are quite varied and take influence from a much wider array of things but in terms of my biggest focal point, so what I would do as my strongest, you know, contribution for the last few years is I teach a system of mind-body development that I call weightlessness. And if a martial artist asks me what weightlessness is, I would say that weightlessness is essentially the stuff that makes martial arts work. It looks to the core of, you know, mind and body development in a deep way. It looks at our bio-mechanics, it looks at our neurology to a certain extent, it looks at how meditation essentially helps us, you know, rewire and address the plasticity of our minds, develop sound structure in the body and essentially how we can integrate the body and mind and perform at our highest capacity. It's a difficult thing to summarize because it's actually become a very extensive system over the last four years. I've been teaching to tribes of individuals in Shanghai - generally, through tribes of about six. They go through a 100-day process of grueling mind and body training, and it covers the full spectrum. Self-defense has always been a component of it but usually through to the extent that we can apply stress and study ourselves under real pressure. Which, you know, I think one of the things that martial artists has better than anything else is it allows us to access deeper elements of our neurology and our physiology that our... you know, ancient to a certain extent, that don't get triggered under normal types of training scenarios and through a calm and regular types of training. But if the competitor knows about it, the street fighter knows about it, these things are essential for really understanding ourselves and how to address and approach stress. To the non-martial artist, I would that weightlessness is fundamentally a way of navigating uncertainty in life. And it deal with how we understand an address stress, how we address change, and essentially, it tries to build a mind and body foundation that allow us to face those things that are strongest. But it comes with key insights and tools that allow us to handle, you know, said stress and volatility in very specific ways. So there are direct correlations, direct applications, there's quite a bit of philosophy in terms of how some of these things relate well beyond training in the gym to life, at large. And we often say, you know, weightlessness is not about that hour in the gym; it's about the other 23. So very much how we take that training and make it something that is not exclusive, domain-specific, but how it becomes something that empowers us in an executive boardroom. How it makes us better partners and parents and athletes and across the board. You know, there's that old quote by Robert Pirsig and Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, which was you know... Well he's referring to an old classical, you know, Buddhist saying which is how do you... You know, the student asked the master how do you paint the perfect painting? And the master replies, it's easy; you just become perfect and then you paint naturally. And that's really, I think, an approach of martial arts over the long haul. But it's something that weightlessness tries to do by design in a much faster process, much shorter period of time. And it seems to deliver, I think. Yeah. I might, if you don't mind, I might quickly talk about its origin.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**





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By all means, please.

### **Tom Fazio:**

So you know, after I left, you know, Colorado and after I kind of gotten the green flag from my old mentor to go out, I went to China and I studied Kung Fu for a little while and, you know, went to Thailand and I studied Thai boxing for a little while but there was still something missing. And at that time, I was well-versed in many martial arts and had been a teacher, specifically of Korean Striking Arts for a number of years, and had learned, you know, meditation techniques from mindfulness a more classical meditative techniques from Hapkido. You know, focused on Qi or Chi energy development, on concentration practices and a wide variety of things. So you learn these skills in martial arts but you wind up, unless you're just... you cross your fingers and you hope stuff happens, but the problem that I had at the time was, you know, I'm not activating my potential. There is something deeply missing here and I don't know what it is. I can't put my finger on it. And just by a fluke accident, I found this kind of cartoonish book that talked about old... you know, the term was lightness training. In Chinese, the term is called Ching Gung (Qinggong) which literally translates to lightness but it's what you see like in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon right, when they're running on the tree tops and seemingly, you know, floating in odd ways. But this has origins and real Kung Fu training that were... Had I not met some of the monks that I trained with and teachers that I... I would not have even given it an ounce of thought. But having seen what I saw, it made me realize that we were far, very, very far, from understanding what we're capable of. But I found this cartoon book that described a couple of these [1:05:38](#) of essentially Ching Gung. And there was, you know, sprinting for 10 miles and there was a leaping 10 feet, and these ridiculous short anecdotes with cartoon pictures and.. And so I remember reading this and I came across a line that talked about the breathing method. And it was this weird moment where 15 years of experience culminated and just like a light bulb went off and I said, oh my god, this is real. I've never seen it. I, you know, nobody's put it together for me but all the stuff that I've been training, and studying, this is where it comes together. And I kind of recount the story a little bit in the first chapter of my book. But it was the moment that weightlessness became more... it came out of nothing but I moved to the jungle of Thailand and I decided to essentially send my time reconstructing with this cartoon I was talking about, but trying as much as I could to do it and then inform in a meticulous way - I'm referring to, you know, modern physiological texts and, you know, Chi Gong texts - and trying to understand how these things could interact and play together. And I was training four to six hours a day and, you know, waking up with the sun and, you know, I had dug a hole and, you know, put the ankle weights on and put the backpack on and every morning, I would [1:07:06](#) and I'd, you know, I'd practice the breathing techniques in accordance with the sprinting and the leaping as best I could. And I would do that in the morning and then I'd, you know, have breakfast and then I do a couple more hours of martial arts training and studying. And then in the afternoon, I would do more training. And you know, before dinner I'd jump back in the hole and would be applying the same techniques and methods. And so I was there for about three months and yeah. And I went into that experience being a black belt in several martial arts and taking my training very seriously at the time. But it's no exaggeration that I had totally transformed in that time but it was in very interesting ways. And it was that my body when I wasn't wearing the weights, which became really comfortable, I felt too light. I mean I literally felt what I could only describe as a physical sense of weightlessness or lightness, and my





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psychology had become liberated. I've literally felt fearless, focus, calm, still, and powerful. I'd wake up at 5 am and I didn't need to stress anymore. I could... you know, the swing; I could do rising kicks at full speed without any preparation. I could sprint at full speed for literally minutes without losing my breath. I had a standing leap of five feet without any difficulty. It was, you know, an extraordinary time. But when I left the jungle and I went to Shanghai and started doing work - Thai boxing - what was amazing was after the following few months, the feeling of lightness that was in my body didn't go away. And that's really when the light bulb went, you know, went off and got solidified and I realized that this is something that was wholly different from anything that I'd studied and trained. And it somehow integrated all these different 1:09:03 of training - the dynamic stretching, the meditative arts, the Chi Gong, the mindfulness, you know, the strength and resistance training, the deep martial arts training, conditioning, footwork, stance work, technical training, and all these stuff - all of it kind of culminated, and it felt 1:09:23. But it was an extraordinary experience; I didn't know how to communicate it, I didn't know what happened for many years and then it took me another decade before I committed as a business direction to teach weightlessness and only weightlessness because nobody wanted it. Nobody knew what it was, I couldn't really communicate it and I had to take the risk with business to say this is it. And you know, people are asking for hotdogs and I've got steak, and they're not gonna like the taste of steak and they may not understand at first but I need to keep insisting on this. And I had, you know, a substantial business so I was able to just use that as a leverage point but it got to a point now where I've been able to teach that exclusively for the last five years and. that's my focal point. And I think that weightlessness is very much... It is martial arts but it doesn't have martial techniques, it doesn't include those things, but to a martial artist, it's what would make martial arts work into anybody else. It's essentially a spirit and heart of martial arts expedited, you know, without the 10, 20 years of technical training proficiency. It strikes right to the core. So that's a little bit of it in principle, I guess, without too much of the technicals.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, sure. And if people want to find you online - social media, websites, and all that - where would they find you?

### **Tom Fazio:**

So I've got a YouTube channel where I am committed to from here on out. Actually, this full year has been kind of consolidating a lot of the content and organizing things that I can start to push it out in a serious way and make it a, you know, make it my sole focus remotely, but there's a YouTube channel. You can find it under my name, Tom Fazio or Tom Fazio sash or rope art will take you right to the channel or the video. But that would be largely weightlessness-eccentric with a bit of martial arts mixed in. I've got an Instagram channel, @weightlessness\_by\_tom\_fazio and the website, which we'll be launching, well, within the week for sure, but weightlessness.co and yeah. For your listeners, I would like to offer, you know, I've got a few spaces left, if any of them would like to be a part of my, what do we call it, I guess the review team or a launch team, I plan to come out to re-release or release some of my books in pursuit of weightlessness again within, you know, couple of months here, probably around early November. But essentially, it's an offer to join part of the team and have access to all of my books now and forever for



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free - if they'd like to be a part of that. And all I ask in return is on launch day, for them to be willing to write an honest review. So that's something that if anybody, you know, is interested in. You could contact me through the site or to sign up to the newsletter and, yeah, I'd be happy to extend that to your guys.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome, awesome. And of course, we'll drop all of the links for everything we've talked about today over on our website on the show notes, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) so you get that one-stop shop. And we'll drop photos and some other good stuff over there. Well this had been a lot of fun. I appreciate your time and your openness and everything, and I'm gonna ask you for one more thing. The way we send out every episode, what parting words would you offer up to the folks listening today?

**Tom Fazio:**

Ooh, great question. One phrase: if you consider yourself a serious martial artist, find way to put skin in the game. Put skin in the game, somehow. You know, I'll just give you a maybe quick example for myself 'cause it's not always easy to apply that. I'm try to make this very brief, Jeremy. But, you know, with the stuff that I developed with the sash work, a lot of people will look at it and say, you know, that stuff won't work. It's too fluffy, why don't you train with knives, which I do, or just pick up a gun, which I do - I mean I train with those, too. But they... It's really important that if you are training in a serious way, and you're training anything beyond absolute foundations, that you find a way to make those things real. And one of the things I've done for years in China is actually, essentially higher fall guys and this is not appropriate for everybody but it speaks to the essence of it which is where I will find a way to need to perform certain things. And I've been a long time out of competitions, it doesn't motivate me anymore. But what does motivate me is having to, you know, hiring somebody to essentially help me turn what I'm doing into an aesthetic or a video presentation. But a lot goes into that because you're nervous about, you know, not being great. You're nervous about, you know, on the day, are you ready? And there's money involved and you've got to be able to show up and all the training and all that stuff. And so I've hired guys and put in hundreds, if not thousands, of hours over the last 5-10 years by hiring guys literally to apply my techniques for the sash and martial arts and Hapkido and joint locks and pressure points and all the stuff that people tell you, you know, you can't do this because you'll hurt somebody. Well I'm not advocating anybody go out and do crazy things or hurt somebody but it is absolutely essential that you test what you do. It's essential that you apply what you do and you find a way to make it real. And that means, 100%, you need to do it under pressure. So if you're training something that is purely hypothetical or academic or it's a technique that, especially if it is a technique, that has hands on, requires sensitivity and is manipulating another person through force or technique, you have to find a way not just to practice the technique but to do it under pressure in a way that take you out of your comfort zone, if not stimulates the adrenaline response. And you know this is... The martial arts is wide so for the philosopher in the martial arts, you may not need this. But if somebody is serious about developing technical skills and being able to apply these things, you gotta get the hours in. you gotta do the drills but you gotta make it real. And there needs to be something, and it can be simulated. I do through a video demonstration, there's a lot of pressure that goes into that and I try to test myself every time. I do it by hiring people; I don't want to lose the



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money but I hire guys to work with me and apply it for one hour straight - these techniques - over and over and over and over until I'm exhausted, they're exhausted, but, you know... I've even had time where I've had three guys rotating in and out for an hour and a half where I don't get to rest and just to create a sense of pressure and urgency. And there's probably a million ways to do this but it's something that... it can't be replicated, you know. And it's great to have great teachers but that's the way of taking the martial arts on for yourself and into yourself and learning what you can truly assimilate and make effective beyond theory, beyond the hypothetical or even the system itself. And that's an important line, I think, to cross.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What a journey. Quite often, I listen to our guest and I take bits and pieces away and find that I'm better because of them but rarely do I engage in conversation with a martial artist and feel jealous of their journey, and this is one of those times. Man, what a powerful, powerful story. And sir, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing all this with us.

If you want to check out the show notes, head on over [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). We've got links to social and websites and all the good stuff like that as well as plenty of other episodes and of course, sign up for the newsletter while you're there. If you want to follow us on social media, we're @whistlekick. Facebook Twitter, Instagram are our primary outlets. Of course we do have some stuff going up on YouTube, new stuff almost everyday. You might want to check that out. If you want to write to me directly, the best way is email - [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). That's all I've got for you now. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.