



Episode 383 – The Problem with Hierarchy in Martial Arts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone, thanks for tuning in! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 383, today were going to talk about the problems with hierarchy in the martial arts. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host for the show, I'm the founder here at whistlekick and you know what, I just love martial arts, I love training, I love all the different styles, I love all the different people i've met and those i've gotten to speak with here on this show. I can tell you for certain definitively, 100%, my life is better because of the show and that's because of all you, your support, your guest suggestions, those of you who've come on the show as a guest yourself it's all contributed to building this wonderful community that I guess I have to say I'm part of, maybe even the founder of? I don't like a part and you're gonna hear more why as we talk about hierarchy as we get deeper into this episode. If you want to find the show notes with transcripts and links and all kinds of stuff like that, head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. And if you check out the stuff that we make and all the other projects were involved in, you can find them all at whistlekick.com. If you buy something like over there you can use a code `podcast15` to get you 15% off training equipment or T-shirts or sweatpants or uniforms there's just a ton of stuff there so check that out and maybe support us a bit, we appreciate that, I would appreciate that. After all we bring you the show for free twice a week and we gotta do something to keep the lights on.

Let's talk about hierarchy. The idea that some people are above others. It can be a really uncomfortable discussion but it's one that we kind of have to have and in a sense it's a contradiction especially when we talk about it within the martial arts. If you think about martial arts, it's really set up in a very



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hierarchical way. And that's because a lot of the roots of traditional martial arts we know now are based in militarism. You have people with different rank, people are instructing others, we even lineup in an orderly way with people of certain rank and certain places, that's hierarchy. But there's also a contradiction in there because instructors are generally students to someone else. There's a pride in being humble within martial arts. In fact in some schools, it's considered an honor to sweep the training flooring and do other things that others might look down upon outside of martial arts. Back on episode 275, we did a whole episode on respect in the martial arts and some of my thoughts there, but i'll give you some some notes. The premise was that respect can really only be given you can't take respect from someone you can't demand respect they can only give it willingly, otherwise, it's just action it's not truly respect. Now when we consider rank and other elements in martial arts, hierarchy is kind of inevitable it's an expected result of the way that we structure things in the martial arts. But hierarchy often results in power and power as we know corrupts. Some of you may be familiar with this famous study called the Stanford prison experiment from 1971 and if you're not I'm going to read you synopsis really short summary of what that experiment was and we'll have the link in the show notes from the American psychological Association which is where I got this summary.

In 1971, a team of psychologists designed and executed in unusual experiment that used a mock prison setting with college students role-playing prisoners and guards to test the power of the social situation to determine behavior. The research known as the Stanford prison experiment has become a classic demonstration of situational power to influence individual attitudes values and behavior. So extreme, swift, and unexpected were the transformations of character in many of the participants that this study planned to last two weeks had to be terminated by the sixth day. Now I use that as an example to show that hierarchy and power are an eventuality in most structured systems they're human nature. Anytime you say someone is above someone else in any context, this is going to play out. People are people and people crave power. Now that doesn't mean that individuals are resistant to it, but we take a step back when we look at trends and generalizations, this is true. Now the biggest difference between hierarchy martial arts and outside of martial arts is that, outside of martial arts we tend to have expectations and checks and balances. Power can't run rampant at least not without others ignoring their role. But within martial arts, who keeps people in check? The answer is really no one.

Last Thursday I had a conversation with Master Tanya Panizzo, episode 381 where we talked about the Not in My Sport initiative and we talked about some of the ways it this needs to change and it is changing because without people feeling powerful and like their innocence untouchable, some of these horrible things that are happening will stop happening or at least happen far less. And were all responsible and we can all hold everyone accountable. Just because I love and respect my instructor doesn't mean I'm going to let them get away with anything, it doesn't mean that I'm going to turn a blind eye to a behavior that I don't think is okay or illegal. Now not a big fan of enforcing things or laws are grand sweeping rules but there are ways to reduce the impact of this hierarchy on individual martial arts schools and on the martial arts overall. And when I think of instructors that i've known, the ones who are continually training the ones who are willing to remain students seem the least likely to revel in



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hierarchy. The ones who are least likely to grab on to power and run with it. Here on the show I've spoken with well over 150 people almost all of them have been martial arts instructors at least at one time or another. So I've got a pretty good idea of what some of these people have in common. Now, first off the folks who have come on the show, as much as you might think it the other way have been pretty humble. Listeners don't get to hear the conversations beforehand and after, they don't get to see the emails that I exchange with these folks to set up the show. The vast majority 90% of them I would consider humble and those who are probably unlikely, to really do well in a situation where their place is top of a hierarchy. A lot of these folks aren't comfortable with that. They don't like having titles thrown around and this becomes a recurring theme of the show, and I know I bring it back a lot but that's because I feel that the more we can explore it and understand it, the more we can suppress the negative impact of these things. Again when I look across the [00:07:54.17] structures of people who have come on the show, the ones with the ego they don't tend to come on the show, they want me to pay them for their appearance or they want to know what's in it for them. These are a lot of the same folks who have stopped training on their own. They simply teach and they see their value as being at the top of that hierarchy. And as much as I dislike it I think it's kind of unavoidable but we can call it out and we can bring awareness to it and we can make sure that consciously it is less acceptable, that we not only speak to each other about it, we identify it, we don't train at the schools where this is instilled and we do what we can to beat it out of the martial arts. Because when we do that, the schools that are instilling better personality traits better morals better understanding of the world, they will flourish and the ones that are turning out the next bully with a black belt aren't going to survive. And that's how we benefit and how martial arts benefits overall.

Now I want to be really clear, I'm not saying that hierarchy is bad in fact I think hierarchy is a necessary part of martial arts but just as learning how to kick someone is a necessary part of martial arts, it doesn't mean that we kick our friends in the face full force all the time and try to hurt them. My favorite quote when it comes to power with great power comes great responsibility from any guesses? Yeah Spiderman who I have to say is my favorite superhero and hierarchy is another way of saying that those the top have power. The higher up you are, the more responsibility you have and that's the component that we need to make sure people don't forget about. That's the piece that separates those who are leveraging hierarchy to the benefit of the students versus those who are leveraging it for the benefit of themselves.

I'd love to know your thoughts know you can comment at the bottom of this episode at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com episode 383, you can comment on social media we share these episodes out. You can head on over to youtube, find the episode there, comment there or if you'd like your comments to be private I rather you didn't because I love when a discussion happens but if you will write me directly that's jeremy@whistlekick.com. Our social media is @whistlekick, Facebook, Twitter, youtube, and Instagram are our primary accounts and if you had to, whistlekick.com see all the different things we've got going on we're adding new apparel all time, were involved in new projects all the time, for those of you that don't know about martialartspodcast.com we help other martial arts podcast get going check that out we just added another one and there's no one going up soon. Its great there's more



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than just this show out there. Show other martial arts podcast or some love but while you're at whistlekick.com you can use a code `podcast15` to save 15% on sweatshirts or hats or shin guards, tons of stuff. I thank you for your time. I thank you for the honor of getting to talk some of this stuff out with you because this is important stuff in my mind and I hope that you get something from it too. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.