



Episode 69 – Martial Arts Instructors & Integrity | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there, everyone! Guess what? It's episode 69 of whistlekick martial arts radio. The only place to hear the best conversations about the martial arts like today's episode, about the responsibilities of martial arts instructors. I'm the founder here at whistlekick. 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 excellent apparel and accessories for practitioners and fans of the traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of you, returning fans, that are tuning in again. It's because of you that this show has grown so much over the last year. If you're not familiar with our products, you can learn more about them at whistlekick.com. Of our past podcast episodes, show notes and a lot more are at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Today's episode also includes a full transcript so head on over to the website if you want to check that out. We also threw in some other things but, for the most part, today's episode is really focused on the content. If you're listening from a computer, you can head on over there, follow along and just see what you think. While you're over there, go ahead, sign up for the newsletter. We offer some exclusive content in there like who's coming up on the show and some other great stuff. Once in a while we run a contest or throw out a coupon to you so get on that list soon as you can.

Now, one of the things we do here at whistlekick is post stuff on social media. If you follow us on our Facebook account or somewhere else, you know that and that's a big part of what we do. It's pretty standard for a modern business and it's fun for us to put out information that we think you'll find useful or entertaining. It's great to learn more about our customers and our fans by seeing what everybody responds to and, as we put together that information, we're constantly being bombarded by an unfortunate and very specific type of news article. If you read any news aggregator like Google News, you'll see a lot of stories about martial arts and you don't have to look too hard for them. Unfortunately, quite a few of them, and lately seems the majority of them, are about the failings of martial arts instructors.

Martial artists are people. We all know that. We all know that there are good martial artists and bad martial artists just as there are good people and bad. Sometimes, good martial artists are, or become, bad people. This is nothing new. Why, then, does it continue on as a subject of so many news stories? I think the answer lies in the way people outside the martial arts community view those of us inside. We're expected to be better than average. Far better people than the average people walking down the street. We're expected to be good, if not great, people all the time and whether or not that's realistic or fair, it doesn't matter. So, when one of us fails in the public's eye, it's a really big deal. At least, it is for the broader world community. Maybe it should be a bigger deal to us versus what it is.

It seems that when someone in the martial arts community commits an act that they shouldn't, we're often aware of it. Now, if the transgression is martial arts related, someone will inevitably jump in. Rank is removed or expulsion from an association and so on. We take care of our own but we also



Episode 69 – Martial Arts Instructors & Integrity | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

punish our own. We don't tend to talk about it much but it happens but when those same people break the law and the criminal justice system steps in, where are we?

Sure, there's a process that's followed. When a martial arts instructor's convicted of some sort of sexual misconduct, they're punished. That is enough with the individual but we seem to forget that misconduct, not only leaves a black mark on the individual, but it leaves a black mark on the martial arts. Whether it's right or wrong, we're held in high regard by the general public and I think that's great and I think it's part of why so many people start training martial arts. Many of us, if not most, have seen real and significant positive change in the character of someone after starting martial arts training. Maybe it was you. The vast majority of martial arts schools improve the character of the people in the sense whether your school has an organized code of conduct or not, we're making an impact. It's part of our marketing strategy to the world and it's a huge component in what convinces people in spending their time and money with those of us that offer instruction which is why we need to stop being so quiet on this front.

It's time that we openly value the perception of us held by the general public because if we don't, it's going away. We'll lose our biggest draw for new students. Without the belief that martial arts training make someone a better person, parents are then just evaluating martial arts classes for their children on the same level that they would look at soccer or some other recreational activity but enough about that, because I think you get my point.

The obvious question is: how? How do we go about doing this in a way that upholds our collective general values but also shows the rest of the world that these people, these unethical, criminal individuals are not the norm. That we do not condone their behavior and we don't even welcome them into our ranks.

Like most of what we do in the martial arts, we start with awareness. Where is this information being spread? Most of it, from my experience, is over conventional media and then spread through social media. If you're in a more populated area, it's not going to be front page of the newspaper or even on the front page of maybe something like Google News in your area. You might have to seek it out and it's important that we do. Based on the research that we do here at whistlekick for our marketing, the three terms where it comes up 99% of the time are martial arts, Karate and Taekwondo.

Martial arts is definitely the most common term and the headlines follow a similar format. Something like 'Martial arts instructor found guilty of' blank or 'martial arts instructor pleads guilty to' blank and so on. Of course, each story finishes up the headline by telling the horrible things these people have done or have been accused of doing and a lot of people don't even get beyond those headlines. It doesn't take much effort to find the articles.

Two days ago, two of the top 3 Google news results for the term martial arts were horribly negative. Today, the top news is about a shooting at a martial arts school. We need to take action and we need to do it often. The first thing I'll suggest we all do is engage with these articles. While the



Episode 69 – Martial Arts Instructors & Integrity | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

internet is certainly not known for polite, constructive comments at the bottom of an article, we have no choice. We have to wade in. We don't have to engage the others that are commenting and we definitely don't have to respond to the inevitable attacks that they're going to make. Simple post alerting the general public that this is not what the martial arts is about and no one will ever permit to train in their school or hold rank in their system while knowing that the person was unethical or criminal are enough. We just need to communicate that fact to people consistently.

Ideally, reach out to the person responsible for the news piece. See if they'll do a follow up on a martial arts school or a specific martial artist in the same geographical area. Maybe get some balance going and if you're not from that area personally, help the reporter find someone that is. Remember, this is everyone's problem to tackle. Secondly, we need to do a better job of tooting our own horns. We're great at talking about rank promotion and competition victories and putting that stuff out there to the local newspapers, press releases and things like that. We're proud of those things. We do a great job with those things but less so, we see articles on the positives. The really broadly positive things that we do. Charitable endeavors like Kick-A-Thons are great. Those need to happen more often and we, as an industry, need to do more to promote those positive efforts especially the efforts of others. Many schools offer, for example, free self-defense classes to women or children.

Let's make sure that the world knows that and why we're doing that. Post it on social media. Share it with your students. I know it's awkward. It's weird. There's something about it that for people that own a martial arts school, and I don't anymore but I did for a few years, most of us just want to do what we do. Teach our students and help those folks in a way that we want to help them but we want to do it privately. That's how a lot of us were raised and one of the things that makes the martial arts great is that it doesn't follow these traditional business values but the world is changed and so have, too, our methods. We have a lot of schools out there that have found that it's a lot easier to help a lot of people when we do follow a traditional business approach and I'm not saying that there's a right way or a wrong way there but I'm saying that we can't just stay on the sidelines. It's time that we prioritize the view that the world has of us, of the martial arts and of martial artists. If we continue to simply turn away from those in our midst that give martial arts a bad name, we'll run out of martial artists.

Now, I know, this is a pretty heavy topic and potentially, one that might upset you. Maybe you agreed or maybe you disagreed. Hopefully, whichever side you land on, you have some feedback with some additional insight; something constructive, ideas for tackling the issue. If you do, please leave us a comment somewhere. Either on the website or social media. If it's a comment you're not comfortable making publicly, go ahead and email us info@whistlekick.com. We can get a dialogue going about this and maybe after some conversation, we can do a follow up episode or we can write a blog post, something because this isn't a subject that's going away.

You can find the show notes, including some of the comments that I'm sure is going to pop up over at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and if it's social media you're looking for, we're on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram and our username in all four places is whistlekick. If you want to be a



Episode 69 – Martial Arts Instructors & Integrity | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

guest on the show, maybe you have some really great insight on this subject, you want to come on and talk about it, let's talk about that. Get ahold of us. We've got a form over at the website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, that you can fill out. Let us know that you want to come on this show for this or for some other subject. Don't forget to subscribe to our newsletter while you're over there on the website so you can stay up on everything that we're doing, not just for the show, but for whistlekick overall. We've got some great stuff that we're doing. If you want to learn more about the products we make, those are separate. Those are over at whistlekick.com. Since you've listened this far, I know you like the show so go ahead, make sure you're subscribed or download one of our apps. We got apps for iOS and Android, that way you won't miss out on future episodes. We're bringing this episode to you twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, and while we'd love the support of your business, the biggest thing you can do for us as a thank you is make sure you spread the word. That's all for today so, until next episode, train hard, smile and have a great day!