



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello and welcome! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 418. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Professor Chris Pizzo. I am Jeremy. Your host on this show, founder of whistlekick and a guy who loves martial arts. Loves it so much, we do two episodes a week and you can find everything about these episodes at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. We never charge you to listen. We don't put our old episodes behind a pay wall, none of that stuff. All we ask is that you help us out where you can, when you can and if you can and the best way to help us out is to go to whistlekick.com. See the stuff we got available for sale and maybe make a purchase and if you do make a purchase, you can use the code PODCAST15 which will save you 15% off everything we got over there from protective equipment, to uniforms, to apparel, it's all there. It's all there ready and waiting for you. Back on episode 401, we tackled the idea of teaching martial arts for money and it was a great conversation and it was one of the first times that we've had a guest on to talk about a subject without having had the guest on to tell their story prior. I thought it was an important discussion but I didn't want to wait but here now, we have Professor Pizzo coming back, talk about his journey through the martial arts and part of how he got to the place that he is now that's got him helping other martial artists, martial arts instructors and schools see financial success in what they're doing. I thought we had a great chat. I really enjoyed it and I hope you enjoy listening to it so here we go. Professor Pizzo, welcome back to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Chris Pizzo:



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Hello, Jeremy. I am so excited and so happy to be back talking to you, my friend.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, I am happy to have you here and that's, I get to welcome people all the time, once a week but I very rarely get to welcome people back and it's something that's a lot of fun and I don't want listeners to read anything into the fact that we don't have a lot of people back. I actually love most of the guests but sometimes there are circumstances where we've got to bring people back. Now, if you haven't listened to our previous episode with Professor Pizzo, we talked about...well, in your words because now, I'm talking about 8 sentences in a row, how would you describe what we talked about last time?

Chris Pizzo:

So, what we spoke about last time was really dispelling the myth that martial artists should not make a good living, a good income based on everything from that preconceived notion of public to the nonsense that Hollywood puts out and things like that and we really took a deep dive on why it's actually so important for martial artists to be perfectly compensated so they can serve to the best of their abilities. We had a really good time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We did, we did. That was back in episode 401 and, of course, you can find that easy now. We'll link it in the show notes. We'll talk about that stuff later. It was important to have you back because we hinted at, you hinted at some of the things that you had done. You had talked about running a large school and alluded to some of the things that you done in life, in your martial arts career that led you to being able to help people on that journey but we didn't go very deep into your journey and I said, you know, something tells me this guy's got a story so I poked at you a little bit. I said hey, let's have you back on and you said okay, let's do it so here we are. We're doing it and while the show isn't live, it's not going to come out today, today actually holds a pretty special distinction that I didn't know until 5 minutes ago.

Chris Pizzo:

Oh, that it's my birthday? Not only is it my birthday, it's my big 45th birthday today.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah! How are you feeling about that?

Chris Pizzo:

Actually, I feel really good. My father passed away when he was 59. By my age, he had already had a heart attack and double bypass surgery, not to compare myself with others but listen, as martial artists, we look and act younger. I look at some of my friends from high school, from college, the ones that don't train martial arts and frankly, they all look terrible. It's pretty, I had some 19-year old girl the other



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

day ask me how old I was and when I told her, her eyes popped out of her head so I feel pretty good, man. I feel pretty good!

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's fantastic. Now, you got a couple years on me but I had a birthday recently as well. I turned 40 last month and yeah, I had a similar experience. I had a couple women who were clearly younger, Oh, it's your birthday. How old are you? And you don't get this opportunity often, I said I would love for you to guess because I'm curious and one of them said 31, the other said 32 and I said, you know what? I'll take it and they had no motivation to lie to me. They weren't selling me anything. There was nothing. I'm not going to see these people again so, yeah, I think there's something in the way lifelong martial artists not only physically express themselves that makes us younger but I think there's something in our personality. Maybe it's the fact that we're constantly trying to learn that is part of the secret of staying young. I don't know. We can probably whole other episode on that.

Chris Pizzo:

Yeah, I hear what you're saying. It's definitely that we keep things, like we're talking about last time, you know? It's one of the most valuable things we impart is that constantly learning, constantly finding things that work well, constantly staying grateful and testing things and I think goes a long way as far as looking and staying young so we're right there on the same, as always, Jeremy, you and I are on this same wavelength.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love it. I love it! Now, despite it being your birthday, despite the fact that we've talked before, I'm still going to put you through your paces. We're still going to talk about this martial arts journey that you've been on for a while. I'm assuming that you being in the industry, helping people make money, having ran a school, you didn't start this last week or last month or I'm going to say, probably not even 10 years ago. If we go back to your origin story, what's that look like? When was that?

Chris Pizzo:

So, I started training when I was 5. One of my buddies, and it's funny, I was just, as I mentioned to you, Jeremy, I was just back with my visiting family on the East Coast. I'm from California now. I'm originally from North New Jersey and we actually passed by the first Karate school where I trained when I was 5 years old. It was pretty cool. They downsized a little bit. I should have actually taken this time, gone in there and help them but time is crunching. So, I started training there. I really wanted to go. I trained there for 10 years with my sister and I but I really wanted to go learn Judo and Japanese Jiu Jitsu and Aiki-jūjutsu at this place that was in the mystical, magical time of Westwood that seemed so far away and my mom made it a big point to tell me that it was so far away. Well, when I got my license, I realized it was only 2 towns over so I started going over there and that really started everything and I trained



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

hard, multiple black belts, changed and went and explored different martial arts but even when I went away to school and what not in 1993, when the Ultimate Fighting Championship cage came out, every one of my friends from the Judo school disappeared for a few years and it turns out, he came back over here to California and learned Brazilian Jiu Jitsu from Royler Gracie and came back and started teaching us at the Judo schools some Jiu Jitsu and I migrated over to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and now, that's primarily what I train in is Judo and teach Judo and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu so I love it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. Okay, now you kind of glossed over the multiple black belts thing and I suspect there's some humility in there so I'm not going to pick on you too much about that but it's not a common thing. We recognize that, as martial artists, but many of us, and I don't even dare say most, but many of us will do a little bit of cross training. Maybe we'll spend a little bit of time over this other school or this other style or maybe we start with one thing but find that our love is somewhere else but to make the commitment, to put in the time, the years, the hours, blood, sweat and tears and some other clichés, in order to earn a black belt, that's a big deal. So, what were those other things and why those other things?

Chris Pizzo:

So, there was, of course, starting with Taekwondo and Hapkido then moving over to Gōjū-ryū Karate and to Aiki-jūjutsu and, of course, Judo and then, Tekkenryu Jujutsu which is hand to hand combat and then Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and what's interesting and the reason I oftentimes just kind of gloss over it is something I've learned and I've been training now, I'm 45 today, I've been training for 40 years and there's a lot of other, my teachers, a lot of other people, I'm sure listeners have been training even longer than that and something that happens when you get past a certain point of your own ego is that you realize that the joy is actually in the journey. Not in the accomplishment of getting a black belt or becoming a master, something like that, so the personalized journey of every individual martial artist is what's important and so, I've gotten, I've actually caught a lot of flak from certain egocentric martial artist that oh my god, why did you jump around from here to there to there? It's not that I got bored or that the teachers, I ran out of things to learn, is that my personal journey is individual. I go where the journey takes me and when some things start to feel not right or wrong, I use that emotional guiding system to determine where to go next. It's why even my Brazilian Jiu Jitsu journey, the only reason I left the original, my friend Lewis said back in New Jersey because I did move to California, even out here, I moved from Gracie [00:12:19] now, Brazilian Top Team, I'm still in contact with everybody. I love those guys to death. Every single one of them has helped me. It's just that at certain points in my life, I'm looking and finding certain elements that I need for both myself and my 4 boys at this point in my life and I think that's an important thing. I hope I didn't gloss over anything there, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

No, no. Not at all. It sounds like you kind of settled into, and I don't want to say settled, but settled into Brazilian Jiu Jitsu training. Are you still doing other stuff or is that what has the majority of your time training now?

Chris Pizzo:

Let's actually crack the egg open. Most people, martial artists listening to this, might actually remember me better by my former aliases in previous professional life which was Lieutenant X or Captain Chris. We can talk about that, those businesses, because those were the largest martial arts publishing business in the world that I spoke of the last time. We can talk about that but even now, just to specifically answer your question, is why I have been here and why specifically Judo and Jiu Jitsu? You know it's just who I am at this point in my life. It's funny though, because some of the lower belts are always telling me to stop my "black magic". I love when white and blue belts tell me that hey, listen, all other martial arts are BS and this is the only real thing and then I go out there and use all Aikido on them. I don't even use Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and they're all what is this black magic? I'm like oh you mean other martial arts actually work? And, again, that goes back to that egocentric kind of justification but I just like, there's my body type, my physicality, my, I guess, strategic kind of proclivity. I like board games and video games and chess and whatnot. It just gives me the opportunity to do that. I'm still kind of a physical beast at 45 so I like to get in there and bang a bit but, at this point, I have 4 boys. I'm married. My wife doesn't want me coming home anymore with black eyes and whatever else. I have no intent on becoming a professional fighter so Jiu Jitsu and Judo just gives me, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and Judo just gives me that opportunity to go as hard as possible and hey, you know what? If I want to train tomorrow and my 45-year old body can take it because I dictated the speed, I dictated the technique and the best escape is tapping out when one of these world champion guys get me in a position that I can't get out off so I always feel like I'm in control of what is to happen and I love it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Alright, now, I was unfamiliar with the names Lieutenant X and Captain Chris but I have this really handy thing called a smartphone in my pocket and as you were talking, I pulled it out and you were the subject of many internet conversations, my friend.

Chris Pizzo:

Not only that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We have entry on some websites that...they were writing about me.

Chris Pizzo:



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Oh, that hate site. Yeah. There's actually a book, a marketing book, an advertising book that it's very, it's actually very flattering, the book. It talks about how it gives my history and business and marketing and advertising in a very positive light of who I mentored with, who I apprenticed under and how I'm, not to toot my horn, I'm pretty much one of the only guys in the industry who knows how to actually get value from what we teach but the title of that chapter in that book is The Most Hated Martial Artist on The Planet which is funny because for, it's one of the things that always drives me crazy, it's actually, and I'm glad that we're talking about this, because it's actually the thing that I've seen and isolated over the last 10 years of helping other martial artists what they're afraid of. They are so afraid of other people either saying critical things about them, calling them things like a fraud or a liar or that the martial art they know can't really work in a real fight or all these other nonsense that actually stop them from success there in their track and listen, I have some pretty successful business, can those things be removed online? Can I take legal action? Can I take whatever else? Of course but the reality is that there are always going to be naysayers. There are always going to be, if you are not willing to have people say bad things about you, then you might as well just lay in your bed and under your covers and die a slow death. It's just not the way we work. The whole point in what we do when we talk about getting self-confidence and absolute focus and emotional control, right? Those are the real powers of martial arts, not about kicking some butt. The whole reason for that is so you can move forward in your life like we were talking about last time, that's the values and that's the skills that allow martial artists to charge maximum dollars. It's not about the tactical component. It's not even really about the experiential component. It's really about the transformational qualities that everything, the fountain of youth we started this conversation talking about, the emotional control, to be able to just not care or not even, to live your own reality where you just don't care what other people say because the people that are saying the nice things that are in your circle of influence, you are serving them to such an extent and they're so happy and everything is so positive that the rest of the world ceases to exist and that's the key, I mean, that's the key to enlightenment as all martial artists are all seeking or are searching for so yeah, but there's a lot of nasty stuff about the way I was, and listen, I'm going to take the responsibility. When you're young and starting a business and you're trying to do things and you learn from people, you take a lot of advice that maybe, even though your gut is telling you not to do, you do anyway. Some of the things we talk about. The income is just not enough, there's got to be that balance with income and impact and sometimes, when you're not being your true authentic self, then you go too far in one area that's why martial artists either make a lot of money or either lambasted online or martial artists that stay poor, don't wind up helping anybody so it's an interesting phenomenon, let's put it like that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It absolutely is. The only people who are lambasting people online, whether it's martial arts or any other industry, if the one thing that those people have in common is that they don't have money and all of the people that they're attacking do have money, that's probably your motivation right there. It's jealousy. That's not to say that people with money, in fact, are infallible. That's not to say that people without money have no legitimate claims to, or criticisms, that's a better word, but quite often, it's envy.



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Chris Pizzo:

What's cool now is...perfect example is a really great guy. He has a fantastic school up in Long Island. He actually saw me speak at a NATMA conference about a decade ago and actually, it's more than that. It was 2007. I'm sorry, he didn't see me speak but I was the talk of the town because I was the only person there that was not pitching anything. I was actually there to help people and so, even though getting back to, even though there's people out there that have issues with themselves and they're projecting those issues on to other people, right? That's what you're talking about, Jeremy, whether it's money or style or technique or whatever it is or whatever's up their butt that day, right? They have some even difficulty day. There are absolutely people out there that are responding to your message, are responding to your methods and everybody has, every martial artist, especially martial arts instructors, just has to realize that they can't be everything to everyone. They cannot make everybody happy so find the people that you're supposed to serve and work with and make happy and just focus on making them as happy as possible and that will make you as happy as possible also.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Where did these philosophies come from? Were these things you learned as you went or are these things that you had some guidance for?

Chris Pizzo:

I was a...so, here's the big thing, if you want to talk about professional journey, is in 2010, my personal income was astronomical. Literally the 1% of the 1%. We were selling about a million self-defense videos, nutritional supplements, books and everything per year and it was astronomical. However, personally, I was the most miserable I ever was. I had attracted, because I was so only money-focused, I lost balance and that, in turn, had attracted this den of vipers. Everybody from big business to other martial artists that, literally, were only there, because they believe of taking advantage of other people. Taking advantage of me, taking advantage of some of the other good people that worked for me, taking advantage of my customer base, we're all generally good people and I had everything from anxiety attacks to I had to be hospitalized for some stomach problems that were stress-related and it was simply because I hadn't found that balance that we're talking about between income and impact. I was making more money than most people in the planet still doing something I loved and I believed in which was martial arts but I wasn't doing it in the manner that was congruent with my true authentic self as a teacher, right? I started my career as a high school teacher. It was my favorite job until that had also had red tape involved in allowing me to push the educational values that children I was teaching needed to survive in modern world and when I left there to start with my own business, I kind of lost track listening to the wrong people again and so, again, after that I had to, we moved to California. I sold and shut down everything I had and focused again, purely, on my martial arts training and that drove me to getting involved with the large Brazilian Jiu Jitsu franchise of the world. They had problems in their headquarters. They asked me to come on, buy the school, fix it, make decisions, the hard decisions they



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

couldn't make. Implement my processes, my programs and my marketing and my business knowledge to it like I have for everything else and, to answer your question, just that journey started to show me where the mistakes I had made in the past really were and everybody makes mistakes. Everybody. In their personal life, in their professional life, it's part of the journey but if you don't learn from those mistakes, if you don't learn from your history, then you make the same mistakes over and over and so, I, there were a few mistakes that I made over and over but I learned from them and each one of them, I noticed where that mistake was and what I had to do to fix it and sought out either the best teachers, the best mentors again in different areas of personal development and professional development and really rebuilt myself over the last decade into, not only someone that I'm genuinely happy as a person but someone that's there for my family, my kids, my wife, most importantly, to all the students and clients that I serve both on the professionally and philosophical side because it's not enough. It's not enough just to want to make money. It's not enough just to live the life of a poor martial artist philosopher. You have to find that balance.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, when you're plugging along and, as you said, the money was good but not much else was. You made a conscious decision to abandon that and to reinvest in martial arts. I'm hearing you correctly, right?

Chris Pizzo:

That's exactly right. Everything was so, and when I mean, I cannot stress it enough. I had, even some of my accountants and lawyers and whatever else, I had an eternal ATM machine. It was literally I could send out a message and in 5 days, 3 quarters of a million dollars come in, literally. It was that powerful that I had built based on everything that I learned and done and whatever else but yeah. So, when my health, my mental state, I was sad. I was just sad. I looked, I consider even going back and just abandoning everything and being a teacher and yeah, I consciously shut everything down. I just shut everything down and we moved to Southern California because this is, many consider this as new Brazil, new Japan. There's more professional fighters and martial artists per square inch out here than anywhere else in the world right now and I stopped everything and went and just trained martial arts for 2 solid years in between and I watched and hung out with my kids and trained every single day and that actually repaired my psyche. Everything that was wrong with me, my health, my mental state, everything was repaired through those martial arts and that's when I realized holy cow, just showing people the general unwashed public were not willing to get on the mat and train like all of us, that was who my customer base used to be and, of course, there were good old martial artists in there as well but showing people shortcuts of self-defense or just a tactical side of martial arts is not the answer. The real answer is that martial arts itself, doesn't matter what style, doesn't matter who your teacher was, what the lineages, it doesn't matter if you have been consistently training, there is magic in there. There is magic and it is what everybody in this modern world of Instagram, Facebook, tweeting, texting,



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

everything, what they really need to bring themselves and find their center and make them happy and I wouldn't trade anything for what I've been through. Martial arts is the most powerful tool on earth.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree. I completely agree and I'm sure a lot of people listening would completely agree but here's the part I'm curious about. I'm not saying I don't believe. I'm absolutely not saying that at all but I'm imagining you in that place. That place of success, that place of somehow realizing that it is not what you want but you made some very big steps and it sounds like, at least in part, you were betting that martial arts would be your solution. How did you know?

Chris Pizzo:

Wow, that is a good question. I didn't know. The only thing I knew, and this is so important and again, Jeremy, it's such a good question and the reason it's a good question because as martial artists and martial arts instructors, this is what we really do is we take the focus. Alright, our martial arts teachers help us take the focus off of what is not working and put it on to something that makes us feel better. You cannot go to a martial arts class where people are trying to punch you, kick you, choke you, throw you, whether you're doing push-ups or drills, there's so much things going on for that hour or hour and a half, whatever your class time is, is that the outside world ceases to exist and your focus is forced to be on the present to be on the now and that now is giving you direct and immediate feedback to whether something you are doing is working or whether something is not but it doesn't matter because you're having a good time doing that and because your emotional guiding system, your feelings are telling you that this is fun, then this, that is the right thing to do so it was an educated guess, right? but all I knew is that hey, listen, when I go to Jiu Jitsu, I feel better so at this point, as I wrap everything up, everything legal stuff, company stuff, paying off scumbags that I worked with to just get out of my hair, you know what I mean? In between all that, let me spend as much time as possible, both me and my children, right? Because I go and help teach their classes also. Just spending something that makes me feel good and what makes me feel good was Jiu Jitsu and martial arts and that consistency of months and months and then years and years of getting really, really back into it? It wasn't about me being some world champion. It was just about me doing something that made me feel good and that fixed me. That, honest to God, honestly fixed me. Physically and mentally. Honest to god, that's what I try to impart to other martial arts instructors now. Looking at what I done in the past and bridging the advertising, marketing and business with the real power that martial arts has and again, every martial artists who has been training over 5 years knows this and has that same power. It never ceases to amaze me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a pretty powerful story and what's interesting about it is that we haven't heard a lot but we heard it a couple times and I'm not going to call anybody out. I'm not going to name names but long time listeners, there might be one or two people that you're hearing that there's some similarities in there



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

and what I find interesting is it's not about money. We've heard a similar story from plenty of people who have no money that just something in what they were doing, they felt the answers were there somewhere in the martial arts so they found a way to invest even more time. Not everyone was training 7 days a week but they found a way to train more and they found a way to find those answers within the 4 walls. A lot of people use the term dojo generically, I don't do that, but within their training hall of choice. The answers were on the mats, so to speak.

Chris Pizzo:

I remember one time, I was, myself and Master Joe Moreira, him and I were teaching a class and there was so, this is right in the middle, this is probably circa 2013 or something like that and I was so close to the end of putting my past life behind me and something triggered that day. Just literally it hit me like a falling piano, just stress and this and that and I get on the mat and Joe looks at me, says, what's the matter with you? I tell him. He goes there's no time for that nonsense now. It's Jiu Jitsu time and he was absolutely right and for that hour, I was just Man Dummy. He choked me out so many times, I couldn't lift my head for a week but just that little bit of guidance, right? From somebody with such history and accolades and has been training for so long, that little bit of guidance meant everything to me and the rest of my day and the rest of that week allowed me the freedom to refocus and get the things done that I needed to do and that's the big takeaway here for everybody is that the rest of the world doesn't know this. We take it for granted but everybody else and it's so funny because we all talk to our friends about, and they all know we're martial artists because it's all we talk about sometimes, and they always say oh yeah, I'm going to come by for a class and I'll try it out and how do you stay in good shape or how come you seem so cool and calm? You talk about this stuff and they never show up and they never do it because no martial artists, especially martial arts instructors and school owners, ever talks about those real problems. They talk about self-control and self-confidence and physical fitness and fighting ability but they never talk about the actual bleeding neck problem which is people need, especially in this day and age, they need emotional control. They need focus. They have a problem doing that and that's what martial arts does. That's what it does for all of us and that's how come, as experienced martial artists, there is an opportunity to make a very, very, very good living. Not so you can buy crap like yachts and Ferraris and stuff, right? But so that you have the freedom to continue your journey, like you just said, Jeremy so that's really, really important.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I wish and I don't get political in this show very often. This might be the first time ever and I'm being very specific. Anyone who chooses to read anything into this statement, you are doing so likely out of your own prejudices. I wish money had less stigma in the world because it is a tool. It is the only store of time, store of knowledge and it can be used to such wonderful, wonderful ways.

Chris Pizzo:



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

You know what I found fascinating? During my journey, there was a point where I was very satisfied and I was doing some, I was helping martial arts schools and whatnot, but I was making the bulk of income for my family through consulting with wealth management firms and real estate investment firms to utilize my marketing and advertising business background and I found that the highest suicide rate is actually among billionaires. You can argue that there's not a whole lot of them so it seems like it but the reality is that what you just said about the stigma, it's not enough just to want to make a lot of money. It's not enough just to want to make a lot of money doing what you love. You have to find that balance, like I said before, between income and impact. It's like food and water. Money is like water. If you don't have it, you won't be able to buy your necessities of life. You won't be able to survive but if you don't have the impact, that's like food. You cannot, you can't survive, I don't remember what it is, but you can't survive for more than 24 hours without water but you can survive a week without food. It's the same thing. You can't survive without income for a short time but in the long term, if you don't have that impact, you're going to die of starvation and so, finding that balance. That's why I love working with martial arts. Everybody's like my god, everybody is behind the 8-ball. The entire general public has this preconceived notions of what martial arts do, who they are and that doesn't have any place in the modern world and I say yeah, but you know what? They understand that balance and if they can impart that balance onto other people and they will understand that also, yeah, we'll make the world a better place so it's a big thing about the stigma about money but also the misunderstanding that money isn't everything because I had all the money in the world and it was the most miserable I ever was. Again, there is a couple times during that time where I just wish I was just back being a poor school teacher but now that I have been through the journey and I am helping other people, I have the income and the impact in my own life I clearly see and they clearly see as well that that is the answer. To have that balance. Just like martial arts is a personal journey. How much income and how much impact everybody has is totally up to them. Jeremy, you have a world renowned podcast. Your impact is massive. Some people don't want that kind of impact so everybody needs to find where they're supposed to be and what feels right and then stabilize and then, there's obviously going to be different points in everyone's life where what's good today might not, they might want something different tomorrow. It's always a forward moving journey. That's really what it all comes down to.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree. I agree. Keep moving. We're not necessarily sharks but if we're not moving forward, we will stagnate and stagnation, I'd rather die. I really would. Now, it's clear that martial arts is more than a part of your life. It's part of your DNA on such a level that I suspect we couldn't even speculate what life would look like without martial arts so let's kind of take the easy way to answer a question I don't often ask which is what else do you do? What else is in your life? You've talked about family, you've talked about your training. Do you have other hobbies or are there other things that you're passionate about?

Chris Pizzo:



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

At this point, no. Martial arts and the business of martial arts is everything in my life. I have 4 kids, I have 4 boys and my wife and my family, extended family, obviously are very important to me but my clients, a lot of times, got to call me on it that I prioritize, call it selfish, call it whatever you want but I actually prioritize the business of martial arts over anything else in my life. It's what I read about, obviously, there are different tangents of personal and professional developments that you need to explore. I read, we talked about before, my wife gave me, for my birthday, gave me the biography of Stan Lee. The crafting of stories of Stan Lee for Marvel comics and how that business fascinates me because it is directly translatable to what we do to help other people. My kids, it's funny because they're growing up with a father who is a professional martial artist, and I've asked a lot of other martial arts dads, instructor dads about it also, is all of our kids don't seem very interested in it because they know it's always going to be there so my boys are just obsessed with football. They're all phenomenal athletes and they're just so good but they don't understand that the reason why they're so good is because they started martial arts when they were young so it really is, I mean there's other things. I like surfing but I spend all my time reading and working with martial arts clients or doing my own training and my own education. That's all I do. Even, it's funny, I make the joke all the time. If I wasn't for martial arts, I would never work out. I go to the gym and do things because I want to be able to beat the 23-year old muscle head who walks in and my technique is good but it's not fantastic so I still need to stay somewhat strong but if it wasn't for that, there's no ego anymore. I don't care how I look but if it wasn't for martial arts, I want to perform at a certain level because it makes me feel a certain way and that way is good and when you feel good, good things happen. Like begets like so very, very important.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's true. It's true. Now, let's say, tomorrow we wake up and I hand you a ticket. A ticket to train with any martial artist anywhere in the world, anywhere in time, who would you spend that ticket on?

Chris Pizzo:

Jigorō Kanō. As an educator, first and foremost, I think that the way he disseminated all the styles of Japanese Jiu Jitsu in a time where, it's actually very similar today, the late 1800s, very similar to today that the times became so modern that the usage for the, the tactical usage for hand to hand combat kind of was no longer needed. With trade agreements, with the Dutch and the English, even America, with guns coming over, the Japanese quickly realized, hey, listen, there's something to this stuff. There's something to this that needs to be preserved and we're not going to be able to use this against a machine gun so there's something, though, to this. Not only culturally but also mentally, spiritually to this and Jigorō Kanō, as a doctor of education, disseminated it down and developed Judo as a method of education, not only for physical education, but of moral and spiritual education and it's hard to pick because then, the line from Jigorō Kanō to, let's say, made the Gracie Family even but it all goes back to Jigorō Kanō so that's who I would love to train with, to learn from, to sit apprentice under and mentor because he changed the world through martial arts culturally, physically, as an Olympic sport, spreading the culture, of his descendants all over the world. That's absolutely who.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

That's absolutely true. The more that I learn about Kanō, the more I think he occupies this legitimately unique place in our history in that, I think, he is the only martial artist that if we were to remove from the timeline, they would be a substantial change in what was done and where and how.

Chris Pizzo:

I agree, not only wholeheartedly, but based on some of the research I've done. I would argue that it would, the cultural fighting arts of Asia, even be around today because if it wasn't for him because it wasn't just him, there was also his contemporaries, right? He's just the most widely accepted because of his connections in the educational world of Japan at the time but if reading his books and his papers and whatnot, it was definitely a mastermind principle going on. It's not like he's created Judo to fight those other Jiu Jitsu schools, he consulted with them also and it's just amazing. I would venture to say that martial arts would not be here without him, Eastern martial arts at least.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think we might be looking at more Filipino Martial Arts that are just now, starting to get some traction and anybody who hears this says no, no, there are plenty of people doing Eskrima, et cetera, yeah, there absolutely are but compare that with the numbers of people doing Karate. 50 million plus globally. Taekwondo, 70 million plus globally. Those numbers wouldn't be the same.

Chris Pizzo:

No, absolutely not.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, it's a great answer. Great choice. One of the things we haven't talked about today is competition and you being a BJJ practitioner now, certainly, competition is kind of deeply rooted in the way that you practice Brazilian Jiu Jitsu so is it something you engage in, you stepped out on the mats and you rub your smelly armpits in strangers' faces?

Chris Pizzo:

Yeah, I actually used to compete quite a bit in Judo and then, when I first got into Brazilian Jiu Jitsu quite a bit I never really, it makes people laugh when I say this. That I was never really a phenomenal athlete and I tell that to the guys at the gym and they're like what are you talking about? But it's true and at this point in my career as a martial artist, I've trained with pros, like real pros. Pro-fighters, Olympians, where I used to train Judo back in New Jersey but north and south. Everybody from Mike Swain and Jimmy Pedro up in Massachusetts and Jason Morrison up in New York, [00:51:07], they're all there. There's a difference and I'm good friends with Rhadi Ferguson and you lock up with those guys, it's like you realize quickly that you're just a high school quarterback playing with a NFL quarterback and it



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makes you, it's a hard thing, I think, to admit but everybody has their place. Everybody has their journey, again, and so many people I see place so much emphasis on competition. For what, right? It's one thing if they're trying to do it as part of their journey to prove something to themselves. It's another thing if they think that they actually get something out of it. Wasn't until recent years that there's any money whatsoever in MMA and I actually don't even watch MMA even more because it has turned into, and I'm not judging, it's a sport. I don't watch, if it wasn't for my kids, I would not watch football either. It's just not, you said before, not in my DNA but I like competition, again to just reframe it, I like competition when it's for the individual. When you want to prove something to yourself, when you want to test yourself and see where you're really at, that's what it's for but I see way too many martial arts instructors that are constantly, especially in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, they're constantly pushing their students to compete like that actually is going to dictate something. There's a lot of different school of thoughts on that but considering that I started my journey really in a Olympic Judo training center and then, when I moved over Brazilian Jiu Jitsu with one of the guys, the best guys, in the Judo Olympic Training center and he didn't place any emphasis on competition but plenty of people still competed and won from his school really showed me that it's up to the individual. Everything about martial arts is up to the individual. If you want to compete, compete but don't expect the world to then bow down at your feet because you won some medal or Olympic gold or that, right? It should be and should always be for yourself. That's just the way I feel about it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We also haven't talked much today about martial arts culture. We talked about you making some good money selling some books and some DVDs but we didn't talk about martial arts flicks or you staying up late to watch Kung Fu on TV or anything like this. Was that part of martial arts for you?

Chris Pizzo:

Yeah. So, here's the big difference and I tell this to everybody and everybody gets it also is those of us and Jeremy, you're not much older than I am so you fall under the same category. You remember back to the '80s, right? That was the golden era of martial arts media. Everything from the Karate Kid to Chuck Norris to ninjas to the Ninja Turtles to Steven Seagal and Van Damme, right? And you just could not turn the corner without running into something that was martial arts based. It was the sorcery of our childhood for those of us that were interested in it so yeah, that was a big part of it, right? the big changeover that I see today is that, unfortunately, is that because of that media blitz in the '80s, '70s and '80s, late '70s and '80s, is that martial arts changed over from being a way of life to being just an activity. Something to do and, of course, those of us that stuck with it but most people in the US have taken some sort of Karate class or something sooner or later and they don't stick around and the reason being is now, if you look at it, there is none of that. There's MMA which is a professional sport. Nobody, I mean, on one hand, there's every man, at least, thinks he's a thousand percent more effective in a fight than he actually is but at this stage of the game in MMA, anybody saying you can't look at those professional athletes in that cage and be like oh, I can get up there and do that if you are not some sort



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of combat athlete already but that's all we have. Kids go in and they watch, listen, I love the Marvel movies and I love the Avengers and Spiderman and whatever else but they come in, they go in and watch that stuff, they come out not saying hey, I want to go learn how to do that. They want to come out and say oh, man, if I had a billion dollars, I could be Iron Man. I don't have it so I'll just go play Fortnite. They don't say Captain America works hard and learns everything. No, he got a super steroid injection of super soldier serum. Oh, if I only had that so it's a different mentality now. Thank goodness that there's still a...John Wick movies are awesome and I'm surprised that the John Wick movies haven't driven more people to martial arts schools but I think that because those movies are geared towards an older audience that there's this misconception that people feel. I would be awesome too to be able to do what John Wick does but I don't really see the point of it because I'm not a professional hitman because they don't understand everything that we're just talking about, Jeremy, with enlightenment and focus and also, the big thing is that everyone makes the mistake thinking that oh, I'm too old to start so yeah, but martial arts media had a big impact on me in the '80s. Just huge and it's funny because all my friends are martial arts instructors also so evidently, we all find each other.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, there's certainly something special about that martial arts media whether it's the media or once in a while we find good stuff you mentioned. John Wick, those films that just pulls us together. I can't tell you how many times I've talked to people and their version of martial arts culture, and I'm using air quotes here, is they go train and then they go watch a movie with people they go train with.

Chris Pizzo:

Yeah, it's...I believe that while everything for me, watching movies with each other with the brotherhood, the sisterhood, whatever it is, the camaraderie, of martial artists of everybody being on the same wavelength, I would just ask a martial artist to explore more of what is really going on. What is that united consciousness of what are they really feeling when they get together with their martial arts friends outside of, again, the four walls of the training hall, the dojo, the dojang, whatever the academy, whatever it is. What is really going on? What are they really feeling? Why does everybody feel...why does every martial artist feel compelled to talk about martial arts with people, their friends, their family that are not involved in martial arts and, most importantly, why do those friends and family that are not involved in martial arts, why are they so enthralled and engaged when we do start talking about martial arts, right? there's something there and it's definitely more than just the primitive notion of being able to physically dominate another person. Everybody knows that there's more to it than that and the people that do the most disservice to themselves, to their income, to their students is the people who go that route of that martial arts is just about dominating another person physically. What's cool is that most martial arts instructors, school owners, they're so far from that it's not even a concern but they have to look the other way, right? All of us have to look the other way. What is that, what are martial arts doing that is helping us transcend the perils, the unhappiness, the angry thoughts and angry actions of everybody else? How come we are able to keep cool, keep calm, stay collected, to be emotionally



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

stable when the rest of the world is losing their mind over the smallest things? Politically, religiously, whatever it is, whatever the news is harping on today is the whole world loses their mind, yet, martial artists are still able to stay centered. What is going on there? It's beyond the physical, beyond the mental, beyond spiritual. It's a combination of those three that really allow us to succeed on a personal level and when you succeed on the personal level, then you're just literally one step away from succeeding on the professional and financial level and that's why I love what I do so much because it's not hard work. As martial artists, we believe in leverage so it's not hard work when you have somebody who is personally satisfied with someone who is personally happy to then move them to the next level where they're professionally satisfied, professionally happy and their income then follows soon thereafter. It's just the most fun thing in the world to do besides actually training.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely agree. Now, we've talked about where you are and where you've been but where are you going? What's in store for the future for your training, for your business et cetera?

Chris Pizzo:

First of all, I love that. Thank you for asking. My vision of what I want to do, first of all, everybody, all of us know, the martial arts industry is in deep trouble. Like we're talking about Jigorō Kanō before. It's another history repeats itself. In the modern day and age where, I mean even out here in California, I have to sometimes de-program my children based on what the education system and the government thinks is the best for them. If somebody attacks them, to run, crawl away, not to fight back, not to stand up for themselves and I said, you know what? You guys are physically tough. If somebody's beating on you, you can take it but what about all those other people that don't and then see you do that. There's got to be somebody and something that can stand up for what's actually right. I'm not talking about beating people up. I'm talking about just being able to stand up for what's morally, ethically right and that's what martial arts does because you're confident in that are so, therefore, martial arts industry, if you look at the amount of martial arts schools, full-time martial arts schools in the United States all those years ago, there's about close to 30,000 of them. Now, there's less than 15,000. That is full-time operational martial arts schools so in the last 15 years, literally, we lost 50% of the entire industry and it's not getting any better and so, my vision is, I don't mean it to sound a little egotistical but, is to save this industry. It's just given me so much. I mean, we didn't even talk about my health history before I got involved and that is, in my early twenties, I was diagnosed with a really resistant strain of cancer and I fought that for 3 years and I had everybody from hospital roommates die to other people that were suffering from it just passed away and what brought me through it was knowing that when I am done, I am going to go back and train Judo. I read. I would look and I would watch videos and I knew that and that brought me through it so my vision is we as an industry have to stop the in-fighting. We have to stop, first of all, comparing yourself to others is never a good idea. We spend a lot of time today talking about it. everybody's individual journey through business, through martial arts, through competition, whatever else. Every martial artist has to stop comparing themselves to everybody else. Stop comparing



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their styles. Stop comparing their win record. Stop comparing whatever else. I've worked with so many martial artists from so many different walks of life. There are so many different styles for the last several years. Not one martial art is superior to the other. There's just not. Every single one offers something important so there's that we have to stop comparing ourselves and our styles of which is the best and as an industry, we have to band together and we just have to help people to the best of our ability and so, what I'm building towards and this is so conveniently timed. Sometimes, again, a lot of the reasons for feeling good all the time in what you do is because the universe, God, source energy, whatever you believe in provides opportunities and, as of late, transformed my company into something called martial education where our mission is to fully educate martial artists on what it really takes to become a professional. To make, find that balance between income and impact so you can live the calling that to help other people and, therefore, where I'm eventually looking to go with that is to be a full-blown accredited career school and bring the actual career, training back to what it takes to become professional martial artists, whether you want to become a school owner, whether you want to teach privately, whether you want to spread it to media or whatever else. Those are all things that I had done successfully and to a pretty big extent, learned from my mistakes like we talked about and I know what's important now, both the path and the journey and that's really what needs to happen and that's what I'm moving is towards martial education where things going through, graduate high school, instead of choosing to go off to a vocational school or university that they can go to the institute and really spend their lives doing what they love, helping people with something very, very important and making an extraordinary living doing so. That's the mission I'm on.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can certainly relate to that mission and I appreciate you for being on. It's important stuff, as you said, we've lost a lot of martial arts schools and one of the things that I've observed back in the napkin sort of map, because there isn't great data on this, the United States has half the participation of martial arts as the world. If you look at global participation, we're half of that and we're considered to be a hotbed of martial arts. We're really not. I think we just have some excellent martial artists who know how to get in front of a camera.

Chris Pizzo:

I think so too. I know exactly what you're talking about. If you look at, even the statistics of actual, maybe not activity participation but sport participation, Judo in Europe is second only to soccer so there's a lot of people out there that understand everything we're talking about.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, absolutely. Now, if people want to find you and what you've got going on. Of course, we're going to link to your past episode, episode 401, at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com but what are the links if anybody doesn't want to travel around, give them the high points. Where can they find you?



Episode 418 – Professor Chris Pizzo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Chris Pizzo:

Yeah, listen, wayofthewarrior.org. That is where I am. That is where my team is. That is where my company is. That is where the institute of martial education is at this point. We offer, I send out a daily e-mail. Every single day, I send out an email with professional martial arts tips and philosophy on finding that balance between income and impact as a martial artist. We have a free training right there on wayofthewarrior.org. Usually we sell it for \$200-\$300 but it's really robust training on how experienced martial artists can make a \$100,000 a year teaching high-end clients be it through private lessons if you don't have the school or that and through group lessons charging appropriately because, listen, every martial arts school is just based on inflation is still woefully charging but they just don't know how to frame and articulate it to justify the price and value that they're offering so we just show you how to do that. We are an institute. We show you how to do that for free and you can just log-in, you get my daily tips and advice and we'll give you that training for free and if you want our help to implement everything, work with us, all the information is there as well, wayofthewarrior.org.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. I appreciate you being here, I appreciate you coming back. It must've been nice to you the first time and I'd love for you to share some parting words as we head out. What's the last thought you want to leave the listeners with today?

Chris Pizzo:

Wow, we talked a lot about a lot of different things today. I think what I would like to leave everybody with is something that I've brought up before and just to hammer it home is that as martial artists, we are so used to following our individual path that we do forget we're part of a bigger family. Again, it doesn't matter what style, what art, what cultural background. Martial arts is martial arts is martial arts. The physical, the mental and the spiritual aspects of it transcend the tactics or techniques that are unique to each individual style and so, my parting words is cross train. Do not be closed-minded. Every art has its own, again, cultural background, its own philosophy. Do your best to explore and do whatever it takes to invest in your education. I think that's the most important thing is if you are a serious and dedicated martial artist, you will do and you will spend whatever it takes to further your own personal development, to find your enlightenment and a lot of people ask me at this point, and this is funny too, because even when I had that giant business and whatever else, my friends from childhood used to make fun of me is like dude, you don't spend money. You still wear the same dirty Judo gi every day. You don't drive any fancy cars, you don't do whatever else. You take nice vacations, you live in nice places but it seems like you are always relaxing. I said yeah, I'm spending that, leveraging that money to find that free time to increase my education so I can give back to my students and give back to the next generation of martial artists and you can't do that without money and so, you guys every martial artist needs to find that balance between income and impact and the only way you'd do that is you need to spend whatever you have to educate yourself. Whether that is take private lessons with your instructor,



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whether that is sign up for multiple martial arts schools, whether that is start your journey in education on the business path of things, we're here to help, like I said before, but you have to take this seriously because everybody who's listening to this, I know and Jeremy, you know, they all know, like we've been saying, there's something more to all this than just kicking, punching, choking and so, find the balance, everyone, find the balance. Income and impact.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love talking to other martial artists. I love learning from them. I love hearing their stories. I love the differences and the similarities between their journeys and my own and I really appreciate when they are so open about the things that they'd done, the good, the bad, all of it. Thank you, Professor Pizzo, for coming on the show and giving all of that and so much more to everybody listening today. I'm honored. You can find photos and links and everything else at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Remember this is episode 418 and you can find the stuff that we sell, the other projects we're involved in at whistlekick.com. If you do make a purchase, use the code PODCAST15 to get 15% off. Our social media is pretty straightforward, @whistlekick and you can find us on YouTube, on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and honestly, some other places that we don't hang out too much but we're there. My personal email address is jeremy@whistlekick.com and I write back to every single email I get, even the ones that I don't want to. Sometimes, life and business is about doing things that you don't want to do, isn't it? Well, this show is something I love to do and I thank you for tuning in today. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!