



Episode 546 – Dr. Shawna Pandya | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

How's it going everybody? Welcome. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Episode 546 with today's guest, Dr. Shawna Pandya. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host for Martial Arts Radio. I'm the founder of whistlekick. And I love traditional martial arts which is why everything we do at whistlekick is in support of the traditional arts. If you want to see what that means, see all the different things that we do, go to whistlekick.com, that's our online home. And one of the things you're gonna find over there is our store. If you use the code `podcast15`, that gets you a surprising 15% off any of the products over there, and it helps us know that this show is valued, and helps offset some of the costs. You're gonna find plenty of stuff over there but what you won't find is all the information on Martial Arts Radio, gets its own website whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. We bring you two brand new shows every week. And why do we do that? Why do we do what we do? Well, we're trying to educate, entertain, and connect traditional martial artists throughout the world. If you want to help the show and the work that we do, there are lots of ways you can do it, you could make a purchase, you could share an episode, follow us on social media we're @whistlekick, tell a friend, pick up a book, leave a review, or support the Patreon. If you think the new shows that we're doing are worth 63 cents apiece, well consider signing up for the \$5 a month tier, and we're gonna give you even more. In fact, you can go as low as two bucks and even at two bucks, we give you more exclusive content that you won't find anywhere else. If I was to read the bio, even an abbreviated bio for today's guest, you would skip forward. Because it's that long, Dr.



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Pandya has done and is doing a tremendous amount of stuff. She has achieved very high levels in quite a number of disciplines, including martial arts. We talked about her time as a martial artist, and most importantly to me, how her martial arts training impacts and furthers these other goals and pursuits that she has. So let's listen and hope you enjoy it. Dr. Pandya, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Shawna Pandya:

Thank you so much for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thanks for being here. You know, we'll, as we get going, I think listeners might realize that we could have introduced you by a number of titles. And I'll let that unfold as it goes. But as I was looking through your bio and stuff there, there are a lot of ways that we could introduce someone who has done the things that you have done and I find that fascinating, of course here on martial arts radio. It's about showcasing how martial arts leads to other things and sets people up for life. And I've got a feeling that martial arts has woven its way into quite a few aspects of who you are and what you do.

Shawna Pandya:

That is very, very true. Um I've often joked to friends that you can take a girl out of the dojang, but you cannot take the dojang out of the girl.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh I like that. I like that that should be on a T-shirt.

Shawna Pandya:

I would wear that T-shirt. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There we go. Maybe that's our next t-shirt. I mean, we I don't know. It's it's your it's your idea. So I don't wanna steal it. But somebody's got to put that on a shirt. You should put that on a shirt.

Shawna Pandya:

Well tell you what if people listening tell us on social media that they would wear that shirt. I think we should go ahead and make.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Perfect. Let's do it. Let's do it. Now dojang suggests to me Taekwondo.

Shawna Pandya:



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Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is that where you started?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Was that your first martial art? How did that happen? How did you get started in Taekwondo?

Shawna Pandya:

Okay, so, um, what may become apparent throughout the course of this conversation is, as a kid, I was quite ambitious that I had a lot of goals. And at one point in my life, like, when I was 10, I sat down and made, it was like, okay you're 10 like, what have you done with your life? And so then I made, I made those list of things that I wanted to achieve in my life. And one of those included getting a black belt in the martial art. Um, and so that that went on the list, and then a few more years rolled by, and again, it's sort of like this existential crisis. I was 15 and I was like, okay you're 15, what have you done to achieve any of your goals? You haven't even started in the martial art. So that was when I decided it was time. And so my, you know, I think a lot of the way many of us get involved of martial arts is proximity. And, you know, whether that's parents watching their kids, and then realizing, hey, I could do more than just watch and joining the class. So for me, there's a Taekwondo dojang right by my dad's place of work. And so it was really convenient to be able to walk over to the dojang and then walk to my dad's clinic once done once I was done with classes. So that's actually how I ended up in martial art. So it's a bit of an existential crisis of being an ambitious kid as well as geographic activity.

Jeremy Lesniak:

All right now, you heard my laugh. Everybody heard my laughter. Coming down with this big life goals bucket list at age 10. That's first, that's something I don't know. I haven't met anybody who's done that at that age number one, two, do you still have that list?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, that's a good question. I don't know where the actual list is because it ended up being quite long. But I think some of the things really stayed with me, you know, everyone has that childhood goal of, you know, wanting to be an astronaut, and I don't think that ever left me. I'm still a space cadet through and through. So, um, the the big, the big themes, um you know, ended up being a part of my everyday life, definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Wow. And I guess the second half of that whole Genesis, is, where did that come from? Was that parental encouragement? Or we could look at it, you know, another way, pressure? Were you around a lot of highly functioning people, like, where does a 10 year old decide, I'm gonna plot out my life?

Shawna Pandya:

You know, that's a great question. Um, I think a common theme of my life is always been pushing the limits and trying to find where that boundary is, and still not having found it. Or when I do find it, just pushing even further. And I was just a really, really ambitious kid and I have an entire TED talk on this about, you know, pushing the limits. And when I was a kid, I joke that I became progressively less ambitious, like, I started off wanting to be a superhero when I was four, or a transformer. And then I realized I grew up a little bit when I was seven. It's like, well, that's silly, you can't grow up to be those things. So then I wanted to be a billionaire, and use all of my wealth to solve all the world's problems. And then again, reality hit and I realized, well, you can't just grow up and be a billionaire. So then I settled on astronaut. And then it's like, okay well then you need to do something before you'd be an astronaut. And then at that goal, in turn was guided by Canada's first female astronaut in space, Dr. Roberta Bondar. So she was a physician. She was a neuroscientist. So I looked at that and I said, okay, well, she's a doctor, check. Um you know, I want to go be a doctor. She's, she's a neuroscientist. So my first major is going to be neuroscience. And so that really guided a lot of a lot of my path. But you know, coming back to your original question, I absolutely. You know, I was I lived in this world of big dreams, big ambitions, no limits. And either, you know, maybe maybe people told me that was unrealistic or maybe I didn't listen, I don't know which but it's working well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, as you're, as you're describing your childhood, it sounds like you might be the first person for whom looking at being an astronaut was a fallback. Which is kind of blowing my mind. So I'm, I'm curious because as, as we talk to guests on the show, we find out that parental involvement, and just the way kids are raised really has such a profound impact in and around martial arts, and of course, as we age, so, you know, you talked about being 15 and starting in Taekwondo. What were your parents thoughts on you getting involved with martial arts?

Shawna Pandya:

You know, they, they just, I think they just kind of went with it. They were never they were never like, oh, you can get hurt. They were never oh, this is this is a guy sport. They were never, never anything like that. I think, you know, this is the age when you're doing your full honors, courseload, you're doing a million extracurriculars. You know, they it was just another thing on the pile. And then once I was lucky that I was taller for my age when I was at that age. And so in anyone who practices Taekwondo knows what a huge advantage that is at a sparring ring. And so when I went to my first tournament as a yellow belt, is that a yellow stripe, no it was yellow belt um and end up ended up meddling. You know, they're



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like, okay, you know, you're enjoying this. You're good at it. I think they were, you know, they were very, very laid back about it. And it actually wasn't until I got older and pursued some surgical training, but they're like, maybe you should reconsider this. And then, you know, when the, the whole idea of concussion in sport became a lot more important, like when I was in adulthood, that's kind of when they am maybe reconsider their their opinions, but overall, they they very much, you know, we're supportive throughout the journey.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah certainly, height, age, when we get involved in what martial art, we get involved in really have quite an impact on how well it resonates with us. And it sounds like you ended up in the right discipline at the right time. And it, it's worked well for you. But I want to start talking about how Taekwondo has feathered out into these other things. I mean, you've thrown a lot of stuff at us already. And I know from reading your bio, that there's there's an even longer list, there's more that we're gonna discover about you. But let's, let's talk about why there are so many things on that list. You, you know, you've made a long list at 10. You updated it in 15. I mean, there's, there's obviously a drive to to accomplish a lot. So I'm guessing, you hate being bored and unless you have too much to do, you don't get anything done. Am I right?

Shawna Pandya:

Uh, you know, that's, I think you pegged me probably better than anyone has. And it's, I'm like Newton's third law of motion. If I'm at rest, I'd stay at rest. But if I'm if I'm on the go, I do not want to stop. I just want to blaze through all of my items on my to do list. So, very accurate.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, you can take a wild guess as to why I was able to peg you as such a person. I don't identify with that statement at all.

Shawna Pandya:

Not at all. No, not one did.

Jeremy Lesniak:

See, you identified one of your role models. You know, this this first female astronaut in Canada, who, ironically, I know a teeny tiny bit about through pop culture and watching the TV show Letterkenny. Surprisingly, when you mentioned the name, I went, oh, that's, that's funny. I know something about this person from a random occurrence.

Shawna Pandya:

That's awesome.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

How did how did? How did following sort of the I want to say in her path, but how did having her as someone that you looked up to start to impact those decisions of of school, you mentioned Neuroscience that that was that was your first major?

Shawna Pandya:

Yes, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Talk to us about how that started to roll out.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah so when you're when you're a kid, and you have a dream, if you don't look at the oh my God, this would be so hard. Oh my god, there's all of these obstacles. Oh, look how much how many years of schooling that is like, honestly, in my in my, my little girl brain, it was okay, she's Canadian. I'm Canadian. Check, check. She's a girl huy. I'm a girl guy, hey, we have so much in common. So now all I need to do is be a neuroscientist, physician, and astronaut and I'm set. I'm like, okay, so that, you know, it really took a lot of the stress off, it's like, okay, well then my first major will be Neuroscience, then I'm going to go be a physician, then I diverged slightly, I think she's a neuro-ophthalmologist, I was like, okay, I'm gonna be a neurosurgeon. And you know, that, it's like, these decisions made themselves and for me, it just took a lot of the pressure off. So you know, it's, I think, for if I was a little bit older and wiser, and maybe thought, thought that through a little bit more, but when you're, you know, when you're driven by something you're very, very passionate about, um, you know, it's, you're excited by by the the frontiers that that opens up, and by the thought of what it means to both attain your goal, but the journey to get there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you make any more of those, those lists?

Shawna Pandya:

Oh, God yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you update it?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, yeah all the time.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

How did they change?

Shawna Pandya:

You know, early, early in the pandemic, I was, things were going really, really well. 2019 was an amazing year, and we could talk about everything that happened last year in terms of extreme environments, exploration, you know, going to the bottom to be living under the ocean for a couple of days, all of that. Um, and so, you know, I had a lot of momentum coming into 2020. Um, and I was like, okay, well, this is a great trajectory. So how do we keep up this momentum? How do I stay on target, and then I kind of made a list of all of the things I wanted to do. And with, you know, with my career, and some of them were near term, some of them were a bit longer term, because there's only so many hours in a day. And, and, you know, it felt it felt really good to, to actually be able to take this idea of a space dream and, you know, break it down further and talk about space and space medicine and actually realized that, you know, all of these dreams I had, as a kid have not only manifested themselves in one way or another, but have actually surpassed everything I thought I could do as a kid. And that's just an amazing feeling.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you remember when you first realized that, that you were surpassing all of these goals?

Shawna Pandya:

Um see, there were a couple of key moments that have all just happened in the last year. And so um one of my one of my good friends, he's a science communicator. And he's, you know, he hangs out with Neil deGrasse Tyson and Bill Nye like, but he's just so humble. And he's just so, so, so sweet. And, you know, he asked me to give a talk at one of the conferences, he's putting on it on exactly that, like on on, you know, charting your trajectory. And, you know, that's kind of when I sat back and reflected on it. And even, you know, the other two key moments, I was at the Canadian Space Agency's Space Health Forum in November of last year, and met up with one of my collaborators. And that ended up turning into another job opportunity where with like Sonic technologies, which is a Canadian company, where I helped develop VR virtual reality technologies for deep space. And we're just standing around just, you know, surmising like, hey, you know, as an adult, you can wear multiple hats, and you can do it in ways that you never thought possible. And so that was the second instance. And then I didn't, you know, it didn't really strike me at the time but the third instance, now that I look back on it was like, holy cow like this, this is, you know, a sign that it's actually possible. And so that instance was last year, the Ontario Science Center. So that's Canada's biggest Science Center, they put together a Canadian women space exhibit. And then they featured three prominent women, Canadian women, who have furthered space exploration. And so this is where things came full circle. And they had my exhibit, my photo, right next to Dr. Roberta Bondar isn't it like, holy cow, I grew up idolizing this person. So then to be featured next



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to her to open the museum as exhibit next to her to, you know, be on stage. You know, that was like, oh, my goodness is this real? Like, I think it's a bit early for me to be here. But I'll go with it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So is it clear to say that, you don't perceive limits, that you just it's that's coming off kind of kind of flip and that's not how I mean it. It seems like when you decide to strike out for something, when you're when you're, when you're working towards something, when a goal pops into mind, your first thought is not all the limitations, or the roadblocks, the things that are gonna make this difficult, but rather guessing the other side, the positives, why you can maybe not the best form question, but I think you know, where I'm going.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, and, you know, I think I think the way I look at it is you know, there's this perception that when you're successful, you're successful, you go from point A to point B, um, but oftentimes the road is a lot more convoluted than that there's a lot more troughs and peaks than that simple straight arrow. And it's honestly my biggest, my biggest sticking point, what's gotten me where I am, is just stick-to-itiveness. It's not giving up its grip. And, you know, there's there was a sign on the on our dojang for the longest in the girls dressing room. For the longest time, that's it fall down seven times get up eight. And it's the same thing with life, right, you're gonna fail, and I've failed so many times. And but it's, it's about realizing that you have to have that mental fortitude to get up, keep going, whether you're in the room, whether you're in life, and it's also realizing there's a way to fail productively, that that success and failure can be two sides of the same coin. I've succeeded, not very gracefully, and I've failed very gracefully. And then taking those lessons learned like dissecting whether whether it was a fight that went well or that went wrong, and you know, and then reviewing the game tape afterwards, and then just say, okay, this went well, let's keep this in my arsenal for future future fights. And or this didn't go so well, and then taking the opportunity to learn and then apply it to the next time you reach a situation. So it's not it's not so much always being successful. It's finding a way to bounce back and that's true for martial arts. It's true for space, it's true for life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can imagine someone listening to our conversation and thinking, well, you know, what kind of adversity has this woman faced? It sounds like she's just knocking down these lifelong goals that any one of them would give most people a happy good life and you're accumulating them like merit badges. You know, what, where is she struggled? So I'd like to ask you that. What does a successful failure look like to you? Where have you had to struggle through some adversity?

Shawna Pandya:



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Sure, yeah. Um, so I think the most prominent example, for anyone who's who's followed me for a long time, is that I have a TED talk called on success, failure, resilience, and pushing limits. And so coming back to the story arc of what it was I sought out to do with my life, I in fact, did make it to neurosurgery. So brain, spine surgery and trained in that for a few years. And then, you know, it became apparent that for a variety of reasons that this wasn't the path. And so after three years of training, in a six year training program, I left and that wasn't a very good feeling like you just you feel like you've hit rock bottom, because you, you, for lack of a better word, failed. You didn't do what you started to do. And, and that required a lot of soul searching, and learning how to reframe and learning to bounce back and, you know, learning the key, the key components of resilience, that it's all the research around it, and reading it, to realizing how important good people are, and the power of a social support network. And so, you know, that that was a very, very, very instructive journey. And it's not that it wasn't an emotionally challenging one, or it wasn't, it wasn't not that it wasn't painful. But it was, you know, what I've learned is that sometimes failure can be the best possible teacher.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can imagine just based on my own experiences, that having to step out or choosing to step out of that program, the emotion, the stress, the feeling like you're letting yourself down or others down. And I've got a feeling that you're probably glossing over the emotional toll that it took on you. So I'm wondering, because I think retrospect is really such a valuable teaching tool. If you now could travel back in time and talk to you then, as you are leading up to making that decision stepping out of that neurosurgery program, what advice would you give yourself?

Shawna Pandya:

As I was leaving the program?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Shawna Pandya:

Um, I think one of the key the big things I've learned is, you know, and this even applies to being extremely busy on a day-to-day basis is that maybe you don't need to, imagine you're swinging through the jungle on vines and we're swinging from vine to vine. Maybe it's not always necessary to know where the last vine is, and where we're going to end up but maybe it's just know, it's about to know where the next two vines are so you don't actually fall off and head me this way. And I think that that's probably just as applicable to life.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Those counter to some of the messaging that we've heard from you today that you don't have to plan everything out. Maybe you need some balance, sometimes you plan sometimes you have faith.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah and I think that's also so there's, there's a couple of philosophical notes there. You know, like, if you're, if you're ambitious, and you're and you have all these plans, you know, you often think about that stereotype of the person who's very, you know, has to plan everything out, everything has to go to plan. And if not, it's, you know, it's cataclysmically awful, you know, because then it's not according to plan. And, but for me, it's always been like, okay, these are the big ticket goals that I have. Now, let's look at the opportunities to get there. And if you know, if something else comes up, we'll evaluate that on its own merit, and weigh the pros and the cons, and then see if that's the right decision. And that's actually how I ended up at the International Space University. And like I said, when I started my goal was to go from point A to point B, neuroscience, doctor, boom, be a neurosurgeon. And then in the same year, I applied to medical school, and I realized I needed the plan B, I needed the contingency that because medical school was so competitive. And so I applied to the Masters in Space Studies at the International Space University, which is, it's like real life Starfleet Academy in Strasbourg, France. It was it was, and, you know, and I thought, okay, let me at least get into this program. And to my surprise, I got into both med school and and ISU at the same year. And that led to a good tough decision I have to make and I had never ever thought that I would turn down anything for medical school and, and then this opportunity came along and I realized I really wanted to make space part of my life, part of my career, and that was just kind of what what it came down to the bigger theme of sometimes you don't, everything doesn't have to go to plan and as long as you keep your end goal in mind.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now I'd like to unpack martial arts, you know, we're talking about all these these interconnected elements. And I think it's gonna be maybe a little challenging to do this, but I'd like you to try. What if we were to extract? You know, some let's imagine it like brain surgery, you know, we're trying to disconnect all of these aspects that martial arts became and and lead you to. If we were to separate that from your life, how would things be different? How would you be a different person without having stepped into that dojang at 15?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, and that's a perfect question. So I kind of told you the abbreviated version of my TED Talk title. But because it wouldn't fit all on the same title slide the long version is "What I've learned from piloting, skydiving, martial arts, and my dad". And so I've learned so many life lessons about resilience from martial arts. And, you know, whether they're they're those inspirational posters you see on the dojang wall, or just lessons you learn about the value of being with a team, and where these people become your family, and, you know, I taekwondo I been in since 1999. I feel old saying that. So since 20, for 21



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years now, um, and so to take the lessons learned, you know, I very much I was, I was only partially joking when I said, you know, you can take the girl out of the dojang, but you can't take the dojang of the girl. So, you know, even and I think is the really important lesson for anyone who's had significant time and training in martial arts and then had to take time off. It's, it's not, you know, your time away from martial arts isn't a forever thing. And your time with martial arts may not always be a forever thing, it's gonna change depending on life circumstances, but there, there will always be a place for you back, you know, with where I train it, your belt designation is what you've earned. And even if you even if you were a black belt out of it for 20 years, if you want to come back and train, we will start training you back up at the designation that you left up, because that's what you earn. Um, and so it's, it's the same thing for life, for friendships, for relationships, it's sinusoidal, you're going to have your your times when you're training, you know, hours a day, because you have a major international competition coming up. And that's all you do. And you're gonna have years where you have to take time away for me because I was in surgical training. Um, and it doesn't doesn't mean you're any less. You know, it doesn't take away anything from what you've achieved and those relationships in my case, and certainly are there you know, I still message my, my Taekwondo instructor who's become a good friend regularly. So, um I think that's one of the big takeaways when it comes to, you know, looking at how martial arts has an impact my life and what it's what it's taught me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's switch gears, time management. You're doing so much and I could imagine people listening saying how is she getting all this done? How does she deal with this volume? And so I ask you, how do you get it all this done?

Shawna Pandya:

Okay, so I have to you know, I get asked this a lot. And so it's easy to imagine that okay, maybe I'm piloting my own plane and then skydiving into the ocean and then removing my dive gear just in time to rush into the emergency room and deliver a baby and then grab my gym bag and go to the dojang afterwards and like that's that's not it at all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's not what happens? That's not a Tuesday for you?

Shawna Pandya:

I'm not actually James Bond.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, this interview is over.

Shawna Pandya:



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You find the [29:13 - 29:14], find the most interesting guy um...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes he lives 45 minutes from me. That's serious.

Shawna Pandya:

Really? That's awesome!

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah.

Shawna Pandya:

Quite amazing, I thought he was on a one way mission to Mars now but you heard it here first. The truth has emerged. That's super cool. Um, yeah so no, coming back to your question it you know, it's just think of it being a star varsity athlete in high school like there even if you're playing hockey, football, lacrosse, soccer, badminton, basketball, volleyball, there is a season for everything. You are not training for all of those sports in the same night like that would just lead to injury and burnout. And so same thing with all of the hats they wear. So like to put it you know, when people ask me to do the one line introduction of myself, it's that I'm a full time physician in clinic and ER, I'm a scientist-astronaut candidate, aquanaut, Director of the Institute of Astronautical Sciences - Space Medicine Group, VP of Immersive Medicine Luxsonic, martial artist, skydiver, pilot-in-training, and scuba diver. That sounds like a lot. But there's a season for everything. I'm not doing all of that in the same 24-hour period. You know, I, you know, one day might be a research day, one may be a meeting planning day. One may be a weekend on call, right? So it's, it's knowing it's taking the time to know your your schedule, your priorities, and then also, you know, realize what needs to be done today, what needs to be done tomorrow, what needs to be done short-term, intermediate-term and long-term. And so a lot of it is the secret sauce. It's not it's not sexy, it's not flashy, but it's organization, and discipline, and taking the time to invest in in your yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you have any organizational strategies or tools? Are you you know, are you a paper planner person? Are you, you know, do you have some kind of personal Asana, Slack? Or you know, how do you how do you organize all of it?

Shawna Pandya:

Um, so checklists read my life, I have two notebooks. One for my personal that's just checkbox after checkbox after checkbox. Um I have one that's professional. For more for my Luxsonic work. Um, and then, you know, if I have to do write down things on the go, I use digital version of that I use Google



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notes. So I just type things to myself that needs to be done today. Um sometimes I organize them into categories um and then I am part of way too many slack channels for all of the different I'm part of. So but personally, I do just like pen and paper.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, I get it yeah. It's, it's amazing when you when you start talking to people who get a lot done. You're initially you're expecting that there going to be these magic answers. Oh, well, you know, I discovered this this technique that nobody else knows. And, you know, we do that in martial arts too, right? We, we get to meet these amazing masters, people who've been training decades and decades, and, and we think that their success in longevity is gonna be based around some mystical formula that we're not privy to and then you find out it's consistency and it's hard work.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And it's chipping away towards that next checkbox.

Shawna Pandya:

Absolutely. And, you know, here's some. So here's some of the pearls that I've learned from looking into the research around resilience, and it's that same thing, it's that that stick-to-itiveness, that, you know, willingness to not give up. And it's not that I'm smarter or more talented than anyone, it's just that I, I work harder, and I give up less, I would say that's, that's all there is to it. And even the research around resilience says impulse control. So that resisting that impulse to to give up. Um, and then there's a psychologist named Angela Duckworth. And she wrote a book called "Grit". And it was funny because I was listening to this, her one of her interviews around the time the book came out. And this is actually when I was training for the World Cup for Taekwondo. That was gonna take place in Budapest. So this is around 2016. So it was really applying all of these things, both to my training into my life. And one of the things she found in her research is it's not just practice, when you look at the most accomplished athletes, or violinists, or chess masters, it's directed practice. It's, you know, taking that single kick and breaking it down into okay, well, what am I working on today? Am I working on the height, am I working on the accuracy, am I working on speed? And then just working towards a single goal. And if you can, for some people, that's, that's boring, but when you look at how kids learn, and they just do the same thing over and over and over to attain that mastery. And for me, you know, that's, that's been really a huge part of it.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Makes sense. Anything that I've managed to accomplish or move forward in my life, I certainly didn't just practice or do for the sake of practicing and doing, there was a there was an intention. There was some goal or milestone to chip away at to chart my progress.

Shawna Pandya:

Yes, yeah. And like taking, I think this is a really important point to take the time to give yourself enough credit at the end of the day. Like we get so used to saying, oh, hey, I didn't do anything today and just you know, being hard on ourselves. But, you know, there's 24 hours and if you take the time to list everything you did, it actually ends up being a lot. Even if it's, you attended a meeting, you did laundry, you did, you don't want to list every little thing that you you did in a particular 24 hours actually becomes easier to appreciate yourself. And, you know, give yourself the credit you deserve.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm sure that to-do-list, those checkboxes make that a little bit easier.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, being OCD like me, it's super sad.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I've heard some people suggest that instead of having a to-do-list have a done list, because if you're if you're someone who gets wrapped up in the anxiety of not getting stuff done, or feeling down on yourself, because you're not, you know, where you want to be or accomplishing or whatever, that to mark out, these things that you will accomplish day to day, can give you something to hang your hat on, so to speak.

Shawna Pandya:

I have never heard of that concept. But it makes sense because me and my friends laugh at ourselves. Because at the end of the day, um, sometimes when we're going through our to-do-list, we'll joke that, hey, I just added something just so I can cross it off, right? Because it feels good, it feels good to get things done. And again, going delving back into the world of psychology, because this stuff is so fascinating. And a psychologist once told me that the research shows that the two things that are shown to make a day a good day are engaging in activities that are either productive or pleasurable. So think of cleaning your room productive, pleasurable playing your favorite video game, right? So it makes perfect sense that you're engaging those reward centers in your brain.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Now, you've brought up competition a couple times, so let's, let's steer into that and talk about where it went from that first competition as a yellow belt and being taller and meddling to, you know, where did it go from there? And what how does competition fit into your life if it does today?

Shawna Pandya:

That's a great question. So you know, I've, there's nothing like training for competition, because you're going all in, you're putting in the hours and you're doing it with the team, even if it ends up being a individual sparring match, you're training together as a team, you're getting to getting better as a team, you're going through injury, you know, watching your teammates experience injury and recovery. And then when the the events come, you're experiencing successes and failures together as a team, and so my first international competition would have been summer of 2005. This was it was an I think it was the national or international competition in Las Vegas. Um, so I think it was like the US Taekwondo National? But we were we went down as a Canadian team. So it went, for all intents and purposes, it was considered International. And so that's that summer was awesome. You know, you're you're training, you're, you're training for two hours in the dojang every night. And that's just in the dojang. And then, you know, whatever you do for cardio, practice at home, on top of that, you're going to every single sister dojang even if it requires driving 40 minutes an hour, one way to get there, you know, you're you're sweating buckets, you're, you're setting the goals for what you want, what it is you want to achieve. And, and so that was you know, that was the training was valuable, and bonding with the team was valuable. And then when he got to the day, you know, the week weekend of the competition, it was the first time facing international competitors. And this kind of again, speaks to the value of a good team. So I ended up fighting a girl from I want to say Kazakhstan, and she she was good. And rule number one is you don't drop your hands, but I dropped my hands and she ended up punching out my contact [39:31]. Right early on. And so, um, you know, she was clearly dominating the first half of the fight. Um, but this was my team was at the all around the the ring and they were just cheering me on. They're just, you know, telling me to get back in there. And that's, you know, there was it was like a flip, a switch flipped at that moment, and it's sort of like, I didn't come down here to move without a fight and you know, it just sort of like when you're in a video game, when you put on turbo mode, you know, I just, I came back and it was only a matter of time, like it was I dominated the second half of that fight. And, you know, there's still one of my teammates got an awesome photo of, you know, me lining a perfect punch to the face. And I still ended up losing but the comeback, you know, and the fact that the team was there behind you felt so amazing. And so just all of the lessons learned doesn't doesn't matter that it didn't have the outcome I didn't didn't wasn't looking, I wasn't looking for. It didn't end in the outcome I was looking for. But just the experience was was so incredible and so many lessons learned from that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, you know, from your description there, they you're not a practitioner of WTF or WT style Taekwondo?



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Shawna Pandya:

No, no.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've earned that. Wow. What was it like going that far, putting in all that time, as someone who I expect is used to reaching their goals and then not winning that match?

Shawna Pandya:

So I think when you're setting goals for yourself, and we talk about this concept in medicine all the time. We talk about, quote unquote, managing expectations. So you know, one of the biggest lessons that I've learned is that you can't go into every scenario, regardless of how long your resume is, you cannot go into every scenario expecting wouldn't be the best, because that just sets you up for failure. It sets people up others expectations, up for expecting the wrong things of you. And also it doesn't do your team any favors. And so I didn't I certainly didn't go into that, that competition thinking, oh, hey, I'm gonna win more like I've trained for this, and I'm not gonna let my training go. So you know, to to know, or to go in there thinking I would get gold. Knowing that, you know, especially the black belt level, the game changes very much. It's not about technique. It's just it's also about being a chess master. Um, and so, you know, having goals of performing the best and possibly could, playing strategically, you know, performing in the pattern section, performing patterns as best as I possibly could. And those are, that matters a lot more, because if your expectation is gold, gold, first of all, my track record was never gold, gold, gold throughout regionals throughout nationals. There was consistently meddling, but it wasn't always gold, gold, and I, you know, grown up with practitioners who had that track record. And I saw how good they were. So I didn't have that expectation. I had more the expectation of what can I learn from this international experience? Will I want to do it again? And I didn't end up meddling, I think it was either bronze bronze or bronze silver that that tournament. So it was it was more like, okay, you know, this, this was a good start. Where do we where do we go to that? So that was that it comes back to that theme of pushing the limits, you know, found a first limit and how do we build on what we what we've learned there?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think, really, really drill down anything that we do. It's that iteration loop. It's that okay, here's the thing, I'm moving in this direction, I can't get there. What did I learn? How do I potentially adjust and try again? And when I hear someone talk about it, the way you are it sounds, it can sound challenging, it can sound overwhelming. And yeah, I think it's something that we all do at a small level every single day, you know, how do we know not to kick the leg of the chair that's, you know, maybe kind of sticking out a little bit in the living room, because we've done it a bunch of times and know not to do it anymore. We don't put our hand on a hot stove, because well, we probably did that at one point as a child oh, let's not



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keep doing this. And so finding those those paths to success, really in my opinion, it sounds like you would agree, are just ruling out bad options. And coming down to someones that may work.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, totally. And I often like to say that pain and failure can be beautiful teachers, if you if you let them. Like why do we have pain receptors in the first place? Exactly like you said, so you know, if we didn't experience pain, physically, we wouldn't know to not engage in that same sequence of events again. And the same is true of emotional pain, the pain of losing, the pain of failing, it's if you didn't experience that, then how would you get better? How would you know not to repeat that again? And so absolutely, I agree with everything you just said.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm sure you've had the opportunity to travel and train and compete. You've bumped into some utterly amazing martial artists, you mentioned that you're nervous. Your your first or primary Taekwondo instructor, someone that you've stayed in touch with and communicate with often. But are there other people? Is there anyone else that if you want to tell a story about, somebody that made an impact on you?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, for sure and so, um, my, my Taekwondo instructor is amazing. She's been to Worlds, she's been to Panama medal, like, he's, you know, he really is the gold standard. And, you know, he will tell you those stories, like how are you so good? Um, and it's a, you know, he, he'll tell us the 10,000 kick story, he'll tell us of all the stuff he had to deal with when he was just starting out as well. So there's no secret sauce to it. Um, but even just watching my my Taekwondo fellow practitioners, like whether they were the same level, the lower a lower level, you know, you can learn something from everyone you meet. And so I was alluding to the type of practitioner who always gets double gold patterns in sparring every tournament. And, and so there was another instructor like that. And when I started, he was either first degree black belt or black [46:38]. And now I think he's a fourth or fifth degree black belt, but I've only ever known him just have perfect patterns. And, you know, they were, they were amazed, like, you know, just sharp, very technically good. And it's like, oh, you're just, you know, for the longest and it took me embarrassingly long, it took me like, maybe 15 years of knowing him before I realized that wasn't always the case. And so even before he told me that story, I always noted what he did to get better. You know, this comes a little bit back to the idea of directed practice, as well as time management. And so, you know, you'd finish your forms, and then maybe the instructor would take a second to, you know, offer some general advice to class. And I've always noticed, and like that, maybe that 10, that 22nd gap between finishing up one exercise and going to the next, whether whether it was feedback from the head instructor, or if he was just trying to practice a single series of moves, that he wanted to get better at. He would take that time, he would fill the time that most other people would



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spend around reading to try to get better. And, and then he also, you know, so that's the first part of it, the direct practice, and then I'm coming back to the story, you know, that took me decades knowing him, here's a knowing him to find out if he told me he actually sucked at patterns when he started out, and he would just always lose, he would you know, and he finally he just got sick of it. And he just practice, practice, practice. And he'd already been in Taekwondo for years when I met him. Um, but so I only ever just knew him as the technically you know, excellent one, the one who always just was really, really good. And, and you know, same it's that same fallacy mistake that I tell people not to make. Don't look at someone who's successful and assume they just woke up like that. It takes years of practice. So that was really an important lesson. And it's it's funny because I posted that as black belt training secret number 431 to Tora Taekwondo group, it's like take the time to practice and break it down and do it with attempt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's always gonna assume that these wonderful amazingly skilled martial artists just started that way on their first day that they were all that you know, the figurative Chuck Norris, the one who can do no wrong. You know, we look at these people and think they've always been that way but they haven't, none of them have. We all started, we all fumbled. At some point, none of us knew how to tie our belt.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, yes. It's very true.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We all had that starting point. And I think it can be easy to forget when we're around greatness, like that. So it's just as a reminder.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, we've all made a rookie mistake for sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

For in some of us keep making them, isn't it? Raising my hand.

Shawna Pandya:

As a quick as a quick aside so rookie mistake that I made as yellow belt I assumed that the belt needed to be washed. And I super did not separate the yellow belt from the dobok. So for the longest time, it looked like I was walking around with yellow chalk on my back. So there's my three pillar wisdom to any listeners. Do not wash your belt.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Or if you do, separate the colors.

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, hey also yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like it. Now, I always, I always ask this question of guests talking about the future. I hesitate to ask, I'm gonna ask it anyway. But I wonder if we have enough time, mostly making a joke here. But I think there's a moment of truth. What does the future hold for you? If we look out 5, 10, 20, a 100 yearss, and we if we were to get back in touch, maybe have a part two, and talk about what's transpired between now and whatever that time is, what what would you be saying? What would you hope you would tell me? Oh, you know, I did this, this and this. You know, we've, we haven't really talked about your time, you know, under the water. I mean, there's so much that we've got there. So, what's going on for you in the future?

Shawna Pandya:

Oh, gosh, um, the one line answers I hope that I will have gotten to face um you know, that definitely, definitely high on the priority list. I'm continuing to explore extreme environments, you know, living underwater, I would definitely do that again, in a heartbeat. Going to Antarctica that's on the bucket list. And then, you know, it's been a it's been a weird year with the pandemic, I'm definitely ready to get back in the dojang. Um, you know, like I said, Taekwondo and the relationships that I've had with martial arts has been sinusoidal and cyclical, not philosophically, that part's never left, but the physical part. And, you know, it's, it's always like coming back home again. And even when you switch to a different martial art, even, you know, when you you try different, different sports, that's been my experience with muay that. It's very, very welcoming. And so to go to go back, train a little bit, that would be really nice as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah you just copped a bunch of stuff in there, we probably could do a second hour. Maybe maybe we'll have to have you back so we can do that. Cool. If people want to connect with you, see what you've got going on. You mentioned it TED talk, you know, where where would people find relevant things concerning you online?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, sure. So the first place I would point them would be my website, shawnapandya.com. So that's S-H-A-W-N-A-P-A-N-D-Y-A.com. And that can that would be a good springboard, you can find me on most social media platforms @shawnapandya. And then if you want to find my TED Talks, I have three of them. I have one on innovation and one on innovation, one on resilience and pushing the limits, and one



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on discovery and exploration, just Google TEDx Shawna Pandya, and that will get you where you want to be.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I appreciate you being here. And I have one more request and that is, how do you want to close up today? What parting words or thoughts, advice, however you want to term it would you want to leave the listeners with as we roll out?

Shawna Pandya:

Yeah, I'm gonna I'm that's a great question. Often I get asked this in, in the STEM field science, technology, engineering, medicine fields, but I think this advice applies just as much to martial arts. And that is, that is twofold. So first of all, work work really, really, really hard. You know, that work ethic give if universally, universally, for a work ethic is universally useful. The second thing is, act like you belong here, because you do so don't let anyone tell you you're too young, too old, too little, too big, [53:46 - 53:48] to do what you want to do. Um and then the last part is set the standard, you know, be the culture that you you work within, whether it's at work, whether it's at work, whether it's within the training studio, whether it's in the dojang, that it's a reflection of not just what you preach, but it's a reflection of what you tolerate. So set the standard because people are watching you, regardless of your level of training.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think you can really look at Dr. Pandya's story in a couple different ways you can look at it as the story of an immense high achiever, someone who's passionate and dedicated, and gives off this vibe of not sleeping, never failing. Or you can read between the lines. In fact, you don't even really have to with our conversation today. Because she was pretty explicit that that's not the case. And really, it's just a constant drive to learn and improve and achieve. And it's something that any of us can do and I find that empowering. So thank you. I appreciate your candor. I appreciate you coming on and I look forward to hearing more about your amazing exploits in the future. If you want to check out more about this episode, photos, links, all that stuff that we talked about today you're gonna find it at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com Episode 546. And shortly after, doesn't usually happen right when the episode launches but we do get a transcript up for you. You're up for supporting us. You've got some choices, podcast15 15% off at whistlekick.com, or leave a review, buy a book on Amazon, or help with the Patreon Patreon.com/whistlekick. And if you see somebody out there wearing something that they bought from us something with whistlekick on it, please say hello, introduce yourself. We're building something, it's growing and you're part of it. And I appreciate that. If you want to follow along with everything we're doing, check out the social media @whistlekick, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram all over the place. My email Jeremy@whistlekick.com and I love hearing from all of you



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whether it's guest suggestions or show feedback, topic suggestions, you name it, I want to hear it. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.