



Episode 543 – Thoughts on Becoming a Better Instructor | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

What's up everybody? Welcome! This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Episode 543. And today we're talking about thoughts on becoming a better instructor and yes, I did say we hang on, you'll learn a lot more about what I just meant. I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host for the show I'm the founder here at whistlekick. Where everything we do is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to know more about that what that means. Check out whistlekick.com that's the place to learn about all of our projects and our products. Please find our store and if you find something in there you like, you can buy it. You can support the show you support all of our efforts and you can even save 15% if you use the code `podcast15` everything for this show is on a separate website whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You'll see new episodes of the show, two times each and every week. And the whole purpose of the show is to connect, educate, and entertain traditional martial artists throughout the world. If you want to support that work, maybe you didn't find anything in the store that you want to pick up. You've still got tons of ways you can help us out. You could share an episode, follow us on social media tell a friend about what we're doing, maybe pick up one of our books or our programs, leave a review somewhere or support the Patreon. Patreon.com/whistlekick. Patreon is a place where we post exclusive content. And if you contribute as little as \$2 a month, you get access to at least some of them.

So as I said at the top. I said we. It's not a word I've used too often on these Thursday shows, but I'm using it here today because we have a friend of the show, past guest of the show, all around good



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guy. Andrew Adams is here, and not just for today. In fact, we're going to be hearing more of Andrew, as we move forward. Hey, welcome to the show, man.

Andrew Adams:

Hey, Thanks for having me. It's great to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's great to have you here. So, listeners. As you know, we don't talk about newsy type stuff. Very often so I'm just going to give you about 60 seconds on this if that I have been wondering what it would be like to get a co host for some of these Thursday episodes and started noodling with it, and thinking about who might be a good fit, and put it out to a few people, and Andrew jumped up and down, not a lot I don't know if you really did that I just got an email, and said, I would, I would love to do this and if you've had the opportunity to meet Andrew, you know he's a great guy loves talking martial arts and so what better fit. Then, then you man. Thanks, thanks for your willingness.

Andrew Adams:

Oh no problem. Thanks for, thanks for having me it's like I said, Great to be here and I'm really excited.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good. Me too.

Andrew Adams:

And I did jump up just a little bit,

Jeremy Lesniak:

A little bit okay, cool, cool. Don't kick.

Andrew Adams:

Not so much.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not really your style is it.



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Andrew Adams:

No.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, that's all we're gonna dig into on that. I'm sure as we go on, just as the listeners have learned a lot about me over the last five years. [03:02](#) it's been five and a half years now. I'm sure we're gonna learn a lot about you. And of course you do have an episode to remember. Do you know what episode number you were?

Andrew Adams:

I probably should. Somewhere in the 470ish late in the 400 somewhere.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. Alright. Well, we can dig it up, we can add it to the show notes. But if you haven't checked out his episode folks you probably should. And we're here to talk about improving yourself as an instructor and in fact we discussed what to title this was how to become a better instructor which we both kind of agreed was a little arrogant, or at least authoritative and so instead its thoughts on becoming a better instructor. Now if we look at what you do and what I do all the things that we've taught. It's more than martial arts isn't it you've taught more than martial arts.

Andrew Adams:

Yeah, I was I used to teach at a private high school in Northern Vermont. I taught music and still do to this day. And so yeah, music and martial arts instructing both has been something I've done quite a bit of.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And [04:07](#), that's, that's kind of your passion, outside of martial arts right?

Andrew Adams:

Yes yeah absolutely I've got students all over. All over the country, and I like to say all over the world but I've only really had students from Canada so it is international. But I've had drumming students all over, and rate ages ranging from six to 86.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Okay, so if we, if we think about the varied experiences that we've had. We've taught physical things, we've taught more intellectual things. And we've taught a variety of ages and both in person and virtually. Am I getting that right?

Andrew Adams:

Yep, absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So we've got quite the [04:47](#). And anybody who's ever taught knows that you generally have some strengths and some weaknesses with your teaching there are groups or demographics and methods that you connect with and others that you don't so much. So if I was to ask you, what style or groups of instruction if you had to identify where do you struggle the most with your instruction. What would you say?

Andrew Adams:

For me it typically tends to be with a huge range in ability, regardless of whether that's music or martial arts, teaching a class of students that are roughly the same ability level is easy for me. But when I've got for example if I had to teach a class for white belts and black belts, that would be something I would struggle with. And the same is true in a classroom setting as well. Like whether I'm teaching music if I've got students that I have to teach notes and rests to, and others that are already playing full scales and everything that that is a, it's a difficult thing to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is. It absolutely is. And I would say I have a similar challenge. It's because how do you how do you deliver material that a black belt is going to find engaging, that a white belt can also find approachable. That's That's tough. There's not a lot there by the time somebody reaches black belt, probably gone over that white belt material 10 million times. And even if they're down to do it. If you come in and some special guest instructor or something and they get all pumped up and you say all right we're gonna do, low block reverse punch, are gonna say. Great. Okay.

Andrew Adams:

Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How do you address that when when you have a situation like that? what's your strategy?



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Andrew Adams:

Yeah, I've found, I took something directly from music that I use in my martial art class and then I occasionally teach. If I have a student that is a very beginner, I give them something very basic to work on music wise, and I have the students that are slightly more advanced take that same route that the beginner is playing, and they're going to play the same thing but they're going to add extra things on top of it. And if I've got a student that's really far advanced I'll have them take what the middle people are working on, and they're going to add even more stuff, but when it's laid on top of each other. It all sounds like it was made to go together. And so I have found that taking that same type of system. So, maybe, as an example. In a recent class I was teaching I had the students taking a rag and throwing it in the air, and they just had to catch it and so this was a kids class, so they just had to catch it, like it was a punch. And so they're throwing the rag up with one hand and they're just punching, but the more advanced students I had them stand in a particular stance, she could match stance, right, evenly balanced weighted stance, throw it up with one hand but then shift their stance as they punched, so they're all doing the same thing, but the more advanced students are doing something that is a little more advanced.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, and that's always been my strategy too. I think for me when I think about this concept, and especially layers. Right? I think of it in terms of basic so you know I might have everyone start doing an in place front kick, and for the people who really need to stay there and work on that they'll keep doing funky. Maybe I'll bring everybody. The rest of them up to front kick, punch. And then, after a few more reps, some will stay there and then you keep adding on. And so, in the same count, I might have some people doing one technique and others doing six.

Andrew Adams:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that way, everyone's training together and, you know, ideally kind of pushing themselves and looking at what the others are doing and aspiring to get there. Hopefully.

Andrew Adams:

That's the goal.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I just got that has to go. Now what are some of the other strategies or thoughts if we asked that a different way. At some point, you taught your first something and you probably sucked at it, because I know the first time I taught something I was terrible. I was frozen in front of the class. I didn't know what to do. Believe it or not, I was not comfortable in front of groups back then. And I was very quiet. I'm sure there are people listening saying, Jeremy was quiet when when was this was this other person that he claimed to be. How did you start to transition out of being a sucky teacher to a not quite as sucky teacher?

Andrew Adams:

It was making a mental note when I was being taught of the different ways that other instructors taught me, regardless of whether it was in school science. This particular science teacher teaches this way, this other science teacher teaches this way, they're both teaching the same thing but they teach it in different ways. And for me, understanding that there are multiple ways to get the same information across. When I first started teaching. I was like okay this is where it's gonna be. And you're right, I was not very good at it, because I was very closed minded about and looking straight forward like a horse, this is just the this is the way I got to do it. And when I started to understand that there are multiple ways to teach the same thing. I started to be able to pivot while teaching, if a particular style of teaching didn't work for a particular student.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hmm.. I think that's such an important point. I think one of the biggest challenges, early instructors have is an inability or unwillingness to realize that different people learn differently. The absolute thing you did and the way you learned it was the best way to learn it. And that if someone doesn't understand it the way you're teaching it, then they're lazy or dumb.

Andrew Adams:

And the instructor might not even realize that their instructor when they first were learning, maybe did try two or three different ways to get that particular person to learn, but they only saw the one that worked for them, and so they think that's the only way that works.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Exactly. And, you know, there are scientific terms for this and I may not get them but the people learn through sight and sound and touch. You know what was that last one kinesthetic. So you got visual oh maybe visual audio or audible audio kinesthetic learners. Right? And in my experience teaching and I'm gonna guess you've experienced the same thing. The more you can combine that the better when I'm in front of a class I will tell them what I'm doing. I'll show them what I'm doing. I'll have them do it and if



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they're not getting it. I will physically manipulate them, maybe a little bit less during COVID times, but I will, I will put them in place. And so they can see what it feels like to be in that position.

Andrew Adams:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think one of the fears and I think this happens more in martial arts than in other disciplines. Is this this perception that we as an instructor have to have all the answers and be perfect. Do you feel like that happens? Do you feel like people..

Andrew Adams:

I do. For me personally I think it's a pretty big flaw with instructors who have a very narrow mindset of this is the way it is and I've learned everything that I need to learn. I think it. I think it's very important to be able to understand that there's other stuff that you can learn, and to continue to learn...

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I would even take it a step further and say unequivocally, the schools that I have seen that produce the best students come from instructors who, instead of teaching as if they are the greatest of all time and have all the answers. They teach from the position that this is what I've learned and I am still on my journey, and you are now on this journey with me.

Andrew Adams:

I would agree wholeheartedly that. And I mean I understand taking some time off my current instructor now. When he was with his instructor for 20 plus years, and his instructor passed away, that's a major event. And so he took a year or two off from having an instructor because he wasn't ready. That's okay. But when he was when he was ready he immediately started looking out for another instructor, and then found one and is incredibly happy and I think that makes him a better instructor because he is seeing other styles of teaching now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I couldn't agree more. I think everyone needs an instructor in fact I think we did an episode vaguely titled you know why everyone needs an instructor or something like that, years ago. But I think that people get wrapped around the axle on that person has to be in the same system, and no more and be higher ranked in order to call them your instructor...



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Andrew Adams:

I don't think so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no it's missing the point isn't it it's..

Andrew Adams:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because if, let's put it this way, I would guarantee that if I. Let's say I claimed he was my instructor. You could teach me things.

Andrew Adams:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

and vice versa.

Andrew Adams:

Absolutely. Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Go ahead.

Andrew Adams:

You know, it's definitely true. The. And the other concept of being well in order to have an instructor I've got to go to his classes two or three times a week and you know if you are already your own instructor, I mean, for me, I'm in karate so it's, you know, wouldn't be Sensei if you're already Sensei teaching a group of students you're theoretically hopefully already a black belt, you've already learned a lot. You shouldn't have to be in a class three times a week with your instructor, you don't have to. But even if it's just once a month, you know every couple months going down for some sort of seminar. It doesn't have



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to be, like you said, it doesn't have to be in the same style it doesn't have to be even necessarily a hugely rant higher than yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right. And I would encourage looking at it in this way let's think for a moment. When you're a higher rank student let's say you've been training for 10 years and and some of the listeners may not have been training this long but I've been thinking. Imagine, and plenty of the others happen let's imagine that you're 10 years into your martial arts journey, and you find a great deal of benefit in working with a particular instructor, let's say, the instructor that that helps shepherd you to your next level and I don't mean rank but your next big milestone in the way that you view your own martial arts journey. It is probably not because that person was able to help you dial in your back stance in you know form for that that person was so impactful for you. It's because most likely because they're guiding you. They're providing advice, support, emotional energy for your journey.

Wouldn't. Would you agree?

Andrew Adams:

Absolutely. You know, and even if it's something as simple as a different opinion. That can lead to discussion which this podcast does all the time it needs to discussion and thinking about things and having an instructor who maybe does a different style would could actually be very, very beneficial for you as an instructor.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. I would say if you've been training for 20, 30, 40 years. The things that you need the most help with at this point the things you would benefit most by having an instructor have nothing to do with technique...

Andrew Adams:

I would agree.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So what else we got for him what I know you took some notes, and we chatted about this earlier. What what other things if we neglected to impart on our willing students here today?

Andrew Adams:



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I think the biggest, the biggest takeaway is continuing to have an open mind. Understanding that you as a student. You don't have to be as engaged with your instructor as your students are engaged with you. Because theoretically your students are at a much lower level. And so they need you perhaps more of them, you might need the, your instructor so I think understanding that, you know, if I'm if I'm an eighth degree black belt. There's still stuff that I can learn maybe that the instructor I'm going to go to is, you know, 150, 250, 350 miles away. I don't have to go there every week, you know, setting up some sort of once a month, or even I harbored to say during this COVID times even getting together with an instructor online to go through stuff just watching how an instructor teaches can be an incredibly good teaching tool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you want to be the best instructor you can be you should be training under the most people, every time I go to a class. Let's be, let's be honest, I've been training for quite a while. I'm a competent teacher. I've had some people call me a very good teacher, and even use more flamboyant terms and I'm not quite comfortable with them but I think I'm a pretty good teacher. I have taken classes from terrible teachers. 18:52 Gross. They still learn something. Sometimes they learned. Here's another here's another reason to not do that. But I still learned.

Andrew Adams:

Yup. Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think the way that that you as an instructor showcase your relationship with an instructor or instructors says a lot to your students about how much you value that side of the relationship. If you have a bad relationship with your instructors, there's a good chance your students have a bad relationship with you.

Andrew Adams:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What else we got we got anything else for him because that's quite a bit.

Andrew Adams:

You're right, it is. Uhm, I mean, that's all I had it, I, I think just keeping an open mind. Biggest thing.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Now of course if people have thoughts if they if they want to contribute to the conversation. You know we post and talk about this stuff all over the place where an episode comes out. It's all over... Of course the best places to go to the website whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. And this is episode 543 and there's a show notes page and you can leave some comments there and sometimes people do and I wish more of you did more. But hey, that's okay. Of course you can comment on it when it comes out in the Martial Arts Radio Facebook group or if you see it posted on social media. We can, we can talk about that. So, yeah, well maybe, maybe we'll get enough and we'll do a part two.

Andrew Adams:

Great. I would love to.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. All right. Well, if you have additions. You know, I just give you a bunch of ways that you can contribute those to us. Or of course you could email me jeremy@whistlekick.com. And I'm and I'll make sure that Andrew gets wrapped in with all of that, if you want to support us in the work that we're doing, whether you got whistlekick.com. Use the code `podcast15`. You could buy a book on Amazon, tell somebody else about the show or support the Patreon. And if you see somebody out there wearing some of the whistlekick on it, make sure you say hello and connect with him because we're building something here and you whether you want to be or not, you're part of it, or social medias at [whistlekick](http://whistlekick.com). And I'm Jeremy and here with Andrew and from both of us. Thank you. Until next time. Train hard. Smile and have a great day.