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### **Tim Ferris [TF]:**

This episode is a fun one. Ever since episode 2 of the podcast, we’re probably around 140 or 150 now, you’ve been asking for a round 2 follow up with Josh Waitzkin and this is it.

Josh Waitzkin was the basis for the book and movie Searching for Bobby Fisher. He is considered a chess prodigy, although we’ll consider why that term doesn’t necessarily apply to him because he has perfected learning strategies that can be applied to anything, including his love of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. He’s a black belt under the Phenom, 9x world champion, Marcelo Garcia. Or Tai Chi push hands, he’s a world champion.

These days he spends his time coaching the world’s top performers, whether Mark Messier, Cal Ripken Jr., or investors who names you’d recognize or whose assets under management would blow yo mind.

As context, I initially met Josh through his book, The Art of Learning, which I loved so much I helped produce the audiobook. You can find that as a part of my book club: [Audible.com/timsbooks](http://Audible.com/timsbooks).

This episode is deep. Josh is always deep and he walks the talk in the best way possible. We talk about flow, achieving flow states, near death experiences, use of slackline, training elite performers, cultivating sensitivity (and don't mean that in the most woo woo way, but the most practical way imaginable using heart rate variability training, high intensity interval training, breath awareness, etc.), intuition and its application to investing...and it just goes on and on and on. So please enjoy my conversation with Josh Waitzkin.

**TF:**

Joshua!

**Josh Waitzkin [JW]:**

Yes, Timbo!

**TF:**

Welcome back buddy. I'm so happy to be here hanging with you and I thought we could start with a complete non sequitur which is a book you just mentioned to me which I know nothing about, which is, Dreaming Yourself Awake. Can you talk about this?

**JW:**

Ohh, I didn't think we were going to begin here. It's a book that I explored a couple years ago. 20 years ago I started studying Tibetan dream yoga and lucid dreaming. Not deeply, but exploring. And this was during a period where I was getting involved with East Asian Philosophy. And then a dear friend of mine recommended this book.

It's actually funny. We kind of made a mistake together. I recommended another book that he texted back confirming that it was the name. He texted me back that name, that I didn't intend, but that I then picked up and read and it was extraordinary. It's just a phenomenal and very systematic discussion on the art of lucid dreaming in this way that fuses East Asian philosophy with Western science.

**TF:**

And you were competing at the time?

**JW:**

2 years ago you mean?

**TF:**

Oh, this was 2 years ago. I thought you said 20 years ago.

**JW:**

20 years ago was when I started studying East Asian Philosophy. I was competing then, chess and then into the martial arts.

**TF:**

[laughs] I need a little more caffeine.

**JW:**

You've had a rough night.

**TF:**

[laughs] And I wanted to thank you...this is like Tim's stream of consciousness podcast intro. We're looking at a slack line. This is an indoor Gibbon Classic slackline. It's about 12...no not even...10 feet long maybe. It's surrounded by kettlebells and indo board and a triceratops [laughs] which I don't think is yours. Got the Bosu ball there. And I want to thank you for actually making me bite the bullet and grab a slack line which I set up on Long Island.

**JW:**

Yeah, absolutely. I've had some fun on your slack line on Long Island too. Right now I'm in the period of...and I kind of oscillate between these...and my son Jack who's 4.5, we have a great time. I'm on the indo ball, he's on the Bosu ball and we're having a catch back and forth while on these things.

We're always integrating these physiological awareness trainings.

## Cautionary Story: The one place to not do the Wim Hof breathing method

**TF:**

Speaking of which, I feel like we should kind of throw a cautionary tale into this follow up podcast. We obviously trade stories and findings all the time. Would you like to talk about your recent experience with Wim Hof and breathing training?

**JW:**

Wow. Yeah. Well, I had an extremely scary experience. So I'm a lifetime meditator and kind of an "experimental subject" like yourself.

**TF:**

You tend to have better self-preservation.

**JW:**

[laughs] I tend to. Although, I've had a lot of close calls in life. When I heard you speak to Wim, I was extremely intrigued. Actually, it was when I heard someone mention Wim to you on your podcast. And then we spoke about it and then you spoke to Wim, I thought he was a fascinating guy.

I started digging into his work. It's so powerful. And then I started going through his online course. I loved it. I mean the energetic feeling, the electric surging through the body. Ah, I'm also a lifetime free diver; since I was 4 or 5 years old I've been free diving. And so..

**TF:**

Just to put that into perspective, you spend about a month per year in the water.

**JW:**

Yeah. Used to be 3 months when I was younger. Now it about...diving, yeah about a month out of the year. I spend a lot of time now stand up paddle surfing, swimming, diving...the ocean is a huge part of my life.

We gotta talk about our stand up paddle boarding adventures together. Those are pretty hilarious. Timbo and I

have been having some fun with that.

But I started playing with the Wim Hof method and I thought it was incredibly powerful. The intensity you're experiencing internally, it's very similar to training in tai chi chuan moving meditation for 10, 15, 20 years and then being an hour long into a session and you have this feeling of energetic flow inside your body.

With the Wim Hof method, you do a few rounds of his breath meditation and you're experiencing these things. The gains in strength were incredible. The length of the breath holds were fascinating.

But then I made a big technical error: I ignored all the warnings on Wim's site and that you spoke about: **DO NOT DO THIS IN WATER**. Which were all over the place, but I thought, "Freediving is a way of life for me. No problem."

And the major technical error was not realizing, which was absurd after a lifetime of freediving that it's carbon dioxide build up that gives you the urge to breathe and not oxygen deprivation. Hugely important thing. Please, everyone burn that in: it's CO2 build up that makes you want to breathe.

And so after a long swim at the NYU pool a few months ago, I started doing my Wim Hof breathing and did a series of underwater swims. I did eight 25 meter swims and I think I was on my fourth 50 underwater and I, this was after a long workout, and I went from this ecstatic state to unconsciousness. And I was actually on the bottom of the pool from blacking out from shallow water blackout for 3 minutes before someone pulled me out.

And doctors have told me it's usually 40 seconds to a minute to perhaps permanent brain damage or death. I got very lucky. My body saved my life. And they said that if it hadn't been for all the training that I've done for so many years, that I would have been gone.

**TF:**

And more specifically you, and this strike me as so odd, you didn't have the reflexive inhalation of water. Is that right?

**JW:**

I didn't take any water into my lungs which was hugely fortunate because fresh water in the lungs can be terrible. So my lungs had no water in them pretty much. After they pulled me out I was unconscious for 25 minutes; I started breathing on my own though. When I came to 25 minutes later, I was blue everywhere else because my body sent all the blood to my brain and my heart.

Saved my life, and I'm here. And it was a life changer, on a lot of levels. The idea that my 4 year old boy sitting four blocks away waiting for Daddy to come home and me, I'm unconscious at the bottom of the pool, blue. That's the kind of experience that's shattering.

**TF:**

How did that change how you think about training or those types of experiments or life in general? I know that's a very broad question.

**JW:**

Well, first of all, how it influenced my life in general, is I've never lived with such a consistent sense of gratitude, beauty, and love in my life. It's just flowing through my body. Presence to exquisite levels of beauty in everything I do. And a sense of gratitude for the little things.

It sounds cliché but it's embodied and I really feel it. And that's something I'm really grateful for; it's exquisite. My wife is pregnant with another son coming in June and it's made me rethink those questions of risk.

But on the other hand, it's been very important not to over-steer. And one of the most important lessons I've learned for myself in training elite mental performers is that people over-steer all the time...they over-calibrate. And so I've been very careful to sit with this and draw the right lessons out of it and not the wrong ones. And not too big a lesson...and not too small a lesson.

So for example this is a huge technical oversight I had. I didn't realize I was taking a big risk here. And that a lot of big risks I've taken in life, [laughs] some with you, and I think I'm pretty good at navigating those, but I've been thinking about them quite a bit.

## The Importance of Risk Awareness

**TF:**

And being cognizant of the level of danger or risk.

**JW:**

Right. But of course it's very important for me to be cognizant in a group risk as we've discussed, it's important to be present to your own level and the level of everyone else around you.

But I've been really sitting with this. Since I was a really young boy, I started playing chess when I was 6 years old and by the time I was 7 I was the top ranked player in the country.

So I had all this pressure on me. My therapy was flow.

**TF:**

Can you explain that?

**JW:**

Yeah. Like when I was under huge pressure, external pressure for this little boy, my style as a chess player was to create chaos. I loved the game. I loved the battle of chess.

**TF:**

Attacking Chess [Josh's book]

**JW:**

Right. Attacking Chess. And most players when they have a lot of pressure on them in the scholastic chess world for example, and it's true in many fields, they learn how to memorize their way to victory, right? They find shortcuts to getting good fast and controlling the game all the way. They think about points. They think about rankings. They think about winning. They have parental pressures. They have school pressures. They have, sometimes, publicity pressures.

So they want to control their way.

I had a different approach.

I liked to mix it up. I drew up playing in Washington Square park with the hustlers who taught me to battle. It fit my personality. And it was a core part of my competitive style to create chaos and find hidden harmonies and find flow in chaos.

And as I've reflected on this in recent years, it's been a big part in how I've dealt with stresses, has been to put myself into a flow state and this is an element of risk that I've been thinking about.

It's different when you're 20 and 25 and 30 years old as a competitor or professional fighter. Now I'm 39 years old...[also] a dad. Which is the most important thing I've ever done in my life, being a father, and I'm so committed to it.

So I have to be quite cognizant of the distinction for example, between risk competitively and risk mortally. When you're playing chess it feels like life and death. It really does feel like life and death. When you lose a chess game it feels like you've been shattered on the most fundamental level.

So I was quite comfortable mixing it up profoundly. Creating chaos. And I'd be willing to take those risks. But actually it isn't life and death, right?

And then, when you're a professional fighter, and martial artist...you can break arms and legs in a second if you're not in deep focus. You can break your neck.

But again, the stakes are, it's you out there, right? And then when you're a dad, it's a little bit different right, than when you're surfing or rock climbing or whatever you're doing that's an extreme state.

So it's very important for me to be clear about the distinction between what felt like life and death as a chess player and what actually is life and death.

**TF:**

Right. The metaphorical and the literal.

**JW:**

Right. And then there's the state of being someone who has found deep flow as the ultimate therapy.

## Triggering Flow State, Somatic Awareness, and Cognitive Biases

**TF:**

How do you ... There are a number of different questions I want to ask related to everything you just said...

The first is how do you initiate or facilitate a flow state and how would you describe it?

Maybe we can hit that first.

**JW:**

Well I've had a lot of different ways of playing this over the years. For me, I can describe it in terms of myself and then we can go into when I train people how I'd work with them.

**TF:**

Great.

**JW:**

For me, love has been a huge part of flow. You know, I feel in love with chess and I found flow in the self-expression through an art form that I absolutely loved.

And I think this is really important with children: to find something that they feel connected to and that they can express themselves through...that they can bring out the essence of their being through some art.

And then there was tremendous competitive intensity and of course stretching yourself is a very important pre-condition to flow. I was always playing with people who were at my level or above, and so I was always stretched.

And then in my teenage years I started integrating meditation into my practice. So I got very good at increasing my somatic awareness, my physiological introspective sensitivity. I began to feel the subtle ripples of quality in my process. I could feel when I moved from a 10/10 back down to a 9 or an 8.

**TF:**

You're talking about in the meditation itself?

**JW:**

No, I'm talking about through my meditation process...

**TF:**

You became more tactically sensitive when doing push hands or some other type of practice?

**JW:**

Chess initially. And then to push hands.

**TF:**

Why is the tactile component important in chess?

**JW:**

I think it's hugely important in mental disciplines. So for example in chess today, a lot of what I do today is, I have this laboratory of training elite mental performers, largely finance investors. And a huge part of the training is in their physiological introspective sensitivity.

So that's their somatic awareness. That's the foundational training. Why?

Well first of all, we can't just separate out minds and our bodies.

**TF:**

Right. Cartesian duality.

**JW:**

But we can intuitively feel things way before we are consciously aware of them, right? The chess player always

senses danger before he sees it. Just like the hunter will sense the shark or the jaguar before he sees it and then he'll look for it.

So a chess player's process is often to be studying a position to sense opportunity or danger, and then to start looking for it, deconstruct what it is, and find what it probably is and then start calculating. But that sense comes before.

Or if you're a great decision maker or great investor, you can sense danger, right? You can sense opportunity.

But you need to have stilled your waters before you can feel the subtle changes inside of you that would be opportunity or the crystallization of complex ideas or danger or the onset of a [cognitive bias](#) for example, which is hugely important as an investor or anything else.

You know this is one of the areas where, we've had this ongoing dialog in our friendship around what I call "Arm-chair professors"

**TF:**

Philosophologists.

**JW:**

[laughs] Right. Philosophologists. That's a term of Robert Pirsig, the author of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance which is one of my favorite books and thinkers and friend of mine.

You know, the difference between the philosopher and the philosophologist, or the writer and the literary critic. Or the man in the arena and the arm-chair professor.

**TF:**

Or Remy from Ratatouille and Anton Ego

**JW:**

[laughs] OK, I don't know that one.

**TF:**

Who's the food critic. [laughs]

**JW:**

Yes, there it is. And so when we of, for example, cognitive biases...the academics who study cognitive biases speak about them...

**TF:**

And just for people who have no context on cognitive biases, an example would be the Sunk Cost fallacy: "I've spent this amount, therefore I should put good money after bad because I feel like I need to somehow salvage this money that I've put into a given position."

I just wanted to give people some examples. And who um...we've had a number of meals with him...there's a gent...Think Twice...who was the author of that again?

**JW:**

Michael Mauboussin is who you're thinking about...

And so, one of the interesting things about the academic dialog of cognitive biases, is that there's the idea that the biases have to operate completely separately from the intuitive process. As if we have an intuitive process and then we have to go through a checklist of cognitive biases.

In my experience, really high level thinkers can integrate cognitive biases or an awareness of cognitive biases into their intuitive process. So this is a constant process...we've discussed this a couple years ago actually...where you're deconstructing technical awareness into something that...

This process for example, of building a pyramid of knowledge, we have a certain technical foundation. We have a high level intuitive leap. We can then deconstruct the intuitive leap into something we can then understand technically and replicate technically.

And we end up raising our foundation up, higher and higher levels of intuitive leaps. This is this pyramid of knowledge, which in my process, is built upon by...the intuitive leaps are what's guiding it.

Similarly, we can learn how to take tactical material and integrate it into our intuitive understanding. But we aren't going to intuit the cognitive bias. We're going to intuit the feeling...

**TF:**  
that corresponds...

**JW:**  
that corresponds with a bias being present, and so we think about this relative to language again, Robert Pirsig, I like the language of dynamic vs static quality.

If you think about the timeline in a competitive state, for example, a chess game. There is a certain objective truth to a chess position. Think of that as a timeline which is moving. Think of Pirsig's terminology of being at the front of the freight train of reality.

The freight train is pushing through. Dynamic qualities are at the front of that freight train. Think about that as a timeline.

Then the other is the chess player's mind...studying the position. When the chess player is present to the position it is continuing, you are running parallel to the truth of the position, to the dynamic quality of the position.

But let's say the position changes, you move from having a slight advantage to a slight disadvantage. But you're emotionally still connected...attached to having the slight advantage.

Then what's sort of happening is you're stopping. Your dynamic quality is becoming static. But the timeline of the position is continuing, the game is continuing.

And what's going to happen then is you're going to subtly reject positions that you should accept. And you're going to stretch for positions or evaluations that you can't really reach. And you're going to fall into a downward spiral.

So that's the onset of a cognitive bias. In that case, the cognitive bias would relate to, the emotional clinging to a past evaluation.

**TF:**

But if you had the present state awareness, which you had trained through different tools and approaches that you use with these elite performers for instance...you would sense the feeling of that cognitive dissonance and not get caught up in sort of the "slipstream" of that dislocation?

**JW:**

Exactly. And the way you would sense that, is in this case, you would feel a slip away from dynamic quality. And then you would deconstruct that feeling. And then you would see what the bias is that's setting in.

So this is really important to say. It's not that we're going to intuitively develop the ability to know exactly what bias might be setting in at the moment, but we're going to cultivate the ability to have presence.

I think about the idea of cultivating quality as a way of life, cultivating presence as a way of life in little moments. When we're holding our babies, when we're reading a book, when we're having a conversation with a friend, when we're meditating...

**TF:**

How do you help people to identify that feeling? To become more sensitized to it?

And just as maybe as an example of not listening to intuition or instinct: so we were both in Costa Rica recently paddle boarding. Last meal of the trip, we go out to celebrate. We go to this seafood restaurant. Food comes out, it's a Sunday and I leaned over the plate, smelled the food and immediately knew that it was something that I shouldn't eat.

And despite that, everybody's ordering drinks and celebrating, went into the food and about a third of the way through I stopped. And I just pushed the plate away. And lo and behold, everybody gets severe SEVERE food poisoning, except for two who. I guess we tried to narrow it down whether it was the garlic dip or any number of other things...

But yeah, we were on the toilet each like every 5 minutes for the next 12 hours minimum.

**JW:**

[laughs] And the great part was you and I had adjoining bedrooms so we were sharing the same toilet. That was one hell of a night.

**TF:**

And we never saw each other.

**JW:**

But I heard those flushings happening. That was a brutal experience.

I remember you sniffing and this expression of concern come over you at the dinner table. I saw that moment. Maybe I wasn't present enough to you. It's a great example of you not fully trusting your gut. But you were right on.

**TF:**

Or I felt a sort of social pressure to conform and not rock the boat. So how do you help someone, say, in the world

of investing for example, develop...not only develop the sensitivity to separate that signal from the noise, but also to actually listen to it?

## Meditation and Developing the Ability to Sense the Present of Cognitive Biases

**JW:**

These are 2 different points. So let's talk about developing it and let's talk about listening to it. Because they're both hugely important.

And I'd frame them both thematically in different ways. And I build training systems around both that would be quite different.

So when we're thinking about cultivating the awareness, I think that a lot of this relates to a return to a more natural state. This isn't so much about learning as unlearning.

Getting out of our own way.

Releasing obstructions.

I think about the training process as a movement toward unobstructed self-expression.

We have so many habits that are fundamentally blocking us:

- phone addictions
- people are constantly distracted
- people don't have the ability to sit in empty space any more
- people are bombarded with inputs all the time
- they are in a constantly reactive state

So one way you can frame this as, is cultivating a way of life which is fundamentally proactive. In little things and big.

And you can build [inaudible: day?] architectures that are fundamentally proactive. But then getting into the weeds a little bit more, I think it's most foundational to develop a mindfulness practice: to cultivate the ability to sense the most subtle ripples of human experience.

Now I'm been trying to onboard people, specifically in the finance space, into meditation for a bit over 8 years now. And initially I would just try to get guys to meditate and they would just look at me like I was crazy.

Then I had this breakthrough, I realized that if I had them start doing stress and recovery interval training: so oscillating heart between 170s and 140s say.

So let's say someone does a 6 or 8 or 10 minute warm up and they are on a heart rate interval doing some kind of cardio bike or whatever, moving their heart rate up between 170s and down to 140s, when they become aware of the quality of their focus on their breath during the recovery intervals...enhancing their ability to lower their heart

rate more quickly, and then they start to feel their heart rate, listen to it.

When that awareness would kick in, I'd layer in meditation. And the on ramp was just much more successful. And then what I started to refine that with was biofeedback.

So now what I'll have them do is the stress and recovery interval training, then I'll have them do some form of biofeedback. Often with heart rate variability through Heart Math or with a specialist. And then when they begin to have a certain kind of consistency of their ability to observe...to enhance their emotional regulation.

To observe these subtle ripples between stress and coherence. And you can see their biometric data, then you layer in meditation, and then the onramp is even more powerful.

So then they layer in meditation practice. I think [Headspace](https://www.headspace.com) is a wonderful tool for layering in meditation.

**TF:**

I agree. And I think for a lot of people also, starting with headspace before bed, is another kind of "gateway drug approach" to them building into or leading into the morning meditation which a lot of people have trouble with because they wake up they feel rushed. It's another thing to layer in on top of the brushing the teeth, getting the kids ready, etc. and

**JW:**

I think you're absolutely right there. I think it's really important to have a core meditation practice, which is, at least in the beginning...the conditions in your life that are most conducive to deep focus but not being distracted.

Later in life we want to be able to tap your meditation in chaos. But initially, we want to cultivate it in the most peaceful time possible. If you have kids, waking up before the kids are up. Or in the evening once they are asleep. Or if you don't have kids...life is much simpler.

**TF:**

Or during your commute. I've found a lot of people, who will just throw on Head Space or some song that they meditate to when they know they have 20 minutes on the subway.

**JW:**

Right. Yeah. I enjoy meditating on the commute a lot personally. You've been meditating for a long time...what...I'm not sure how you feel about this...I find that if people can have the first 2 or 3 months of meditation practice in a quiet room, then if they do it on their commute, they've sort of built the foundation of it in this really quiet space.

**TF:**

I think that, from what I can tell, it appears to depend a lot on what type of concentrator you are. And what I mean by that, if you look at writers for instance, there are some writers who want to be in a quiet environment in order to hear whatever the muse is whispering. And they'll go to a library or something like that.

I can't do that. For whatever reason, I thrive in noisy environments. Because if I have the noise, it forces me to focus inward.

So for me, studying languages even, in a loud environment, writing in a loud environment, for whatever reason, is a

forcing function for me.

But I can definitely see why, for even perhaps the majority of people...it would be...I think it's partially due to the fact...for instance, I'm looking at your wall right now and the fact that that picture is tilted like 5 degrees to the right is making me totally bonkers.

**JW:**

should we fix it? [laughs]

**TF:**

This is training for me.

But the same is true auditorily [sic]. So if I have a controlled noise like music or the [sound of subway car moving over tracks] of the car in the subway, I can focus on that repetitive noise. But if I'm sitting in a space I want to be quiet and I have that controlling aspect of my personality trying to impose itself on something I can't control, and then there's somebody hitting reverse on a truck and I can hear that outside it will drive me nuts.

Long observation to a short comment, but I do think that if you can drop in in a quiet environment, the point being to "stack the deck" as you said, in the beginning.

Yeah, learn how to do this in a controlled unstressful [sic] environment and then you can ratchet up over time to when you can use it in the most stressful of environments.

**JW:**

Right. Because ultimately we don't want to be meditating in a flower garden, we want to be able to meditate and have a meditative state throughout our life...in a hurricane...in a thunderstorm...when sharks are attacking you...any moment.

**TF:**

Like when you're paddle boarding the last day on a first trip and Josh is like "You'll be fine," and then 3 leashes snap and all hell breaks loose [laughs].

**JW:**

That's a long story. So a little context here. Timbo and I had been on this great adventure, stand up paddle surfing, taking it on together.

And we got a great friend in Costa Rica, Erik Antonson, who has the other podcast other than yours that I listen to...

**TF:**

The [Paddle Woo podcast](http://progressionproject.com/podcast-episodes)

**JW:**

Erik's awesome. He's a great dude. Runs [Blue Zone Sup](http://bluezonesup.com). He's a brilliant teacher. Really fascinating mind deconstructing stand up paddle surfing on increasingly small boards for us and we've been going out there and having some hilariously close calls.

Our last trip a couple weeks ago, we almost destroyed each other.

**TF:**

Yeah. There was this one witching hour where the juju was really weird. Almost everybody almost got decapitated, impaled by a board or a head-on jousting collision, which is what...

## **Embracing Your Funk. Become Wary of Teachers Who Only Teach The Way They Learned Something.**

**JW:**

But the point that you bring up, I think is right on about meditation. When you're building training programs for elite mental performers, the most important thing is to understand them so deeply and build programs that are unique to their funk.

Embrace their funk. That's a term of a buddy of mine, Graham who's a dear friend of ours who comes on our surf adventures with us. He's a brilliant thought partner.

**TF:**

"Embrace the Funk," can you explain that?

**JW:**

Yeah. We have to embrace our funk. We have to figure out...you think about the entanglement of genius and madness. Or brilliance and eccentricity. Understanding that entanglement is always a precursor to working with anybody who is trying to be world class at something, because that entanglement is fundamental to their being.

And they have to ultimate embrace their funk. Embrace their eccentricity. Embrace what makes them different and then build on it.

So when we think about self-expression, it's not trying to take everyone and put them into the same mold. It's trying to understand someone very deeply and build a training program...a way of life that helps them bring out the essence of their being through their art, whatever their art is.

I mean, that's how relate to the path of excellence in chess, martial arts, in different arts, and very actively in the investing space, when I work in the education space with children through my nonprofit. Again, the movement to unobstructed self-expression.

But the problem is the teachers don't listen. They don't know how to listen. They don't know how to (or parents) in empty space and observe the nuance of their child's mind or their student's mind and then build a way of life around that. People are used to teaching the way they learned.

Think about martial arts instructors. Almost all of them trained a certain way and then teach that way, which alienates 65-70% of the students by definition. It's very rare that you have someone who can take the time (and it takes a lot of time) to know someone deeply enough to build a training program and a way of life around who they are.

I mean for me, I only work with 8 teams and I don't take on new clients. Very seldom do I take on new clients. I

won't work with more than 8 people.

**TF:**

You also don't do a lot of PR. For everybody listening, I always get these emails and texts that are like, "Hey, could you introduce me to Josh, I want to have him on my show," and I'm like, "He's not going to do it." [laughs]

**JW:**

You're the only person...once a year or two...the one guy who brings me out of my hermetic cave.

I've lived a bit of a strange life because I'm not on...doesn't feel strange to me...it feels completely natural. I'm not on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or any of these things. I don't even know the names of most of them.

I have an email account though. I do have that.

**TF:**

[laughs] box crate

**JW:**

I cultivate empty space as a way of life for the creative process. So Timbo you're the one guy who brings me out of the cave but we have a lot of fun together.

**TF:**

So you were talking about these top performers and getting to know them on a very deep, subtle level that you can help them express the combination of their madness and genius or at least embrace it, among other things.

How do you think about parenting?

## Josh Waitzkin on Parenting

**JW:**

Yeah, let's dig into this one [laughs]. And then let's remember to loop back after this to finish this discussion of how to cultivate somatic awareness and then go back to how to train to listen to it.

OK. Jack. Well he's the love of my life and this kid is such an awesome dude. And parenting has been the most fantastic learning experience I've ever gone through.

So from when he was born, I tried not to go into it with a lot of preconceived ideas and to be attuned to him. To listen to him. When he was just days, weeks old...he was teaching me.

You know, you talk about "teaching presence," our eyes would be connected and if I would think about something else, his eyes would pull back. If there was any distraction, he would pull me back.

And as he got a little older, he would just take your face and pull it back in the sweetest way. And so the depth of connection, being deeply attuned to a young spirit that hasn't become blocked, that is in that state of unobstructed self-expression, that is just this unbelievably-game learner. Unblocked learner. Jack is the gamest little person I've ever known in my life.

But of course I've been thinking about learning and education for a lot of years and so I had some thoughts. And so, I think that control...the need for control is something that inhibits people in life. The need to have external conditions be just so in order for them to [laughs] Timbo's pointing at my Grandmother's painting.

It's a great painting. Stella Waitzkin. That's her self-portrait. We're going to leave it messed up. We're working on control.

So, from a young age when I started playing chess, I would create chaos on the board like I described. I would play in chess shops with people blowing smoke and music. I'd play chess with loud Gyuto monk chants bursting into my head from speakers.

When I play cards, like Gin Rummy I would keep the melds out of order. I would never organize my hand. I would keep everything out of order so I'd have to reorganize it in my mind. I'd keep my room messy...

**TF:**

I see. So you wouldn't move your cards around to organize them

**JW:**

Right. I was creating chaos everywhere to train at being at peace in chaos. That was kind of part of my way of life and I found it to be a huge advantage that I had competitively.

## **Antifragility Training: Reframing Small “Problems” As Opportunities To Strengthen Your Mindset and Perspective on Life**

One of the biggest mistakes that I observed in the first or two year of Jack's life, with parents, is that they have this language around weather. Weather being good or bad. And whenever it was raining it'd be “bad weather.”

You'd hear moms, babysitters, dads talk about “It's bad weather, we can't go out,” or “It's good weather we can go out.” So that means that somehow externally reliant on conditions being perfect in order to be able to go out and have a good time.

So Jack and I never missed a single storm. I don't think we've missed one storm, other than maybe one where he was sick. I don't think we've missed a single storm, rain or snow from going outside and romping in it. And we've developed this language around how beautiful it was. And so now whenever it's a rainy day, Jack says, “Look DaDa it's such a beautiful rainy day,” and we go out and we play in it.

I wanted him to have this internal locus of control; to not be reliant on external conditions being just so.

And he's 4, he's getting older and we've been playing with these things. We began meditating together when he was a little over a year and just doing breath work.

Initially we started doing meditation work when he was in those most pure states: when he'd be taking a warm bath, when he was lying on his back and being completely relaxed blissed out...we would just naturally breathe together.

I wanted a habit to be formed in something where the initial experience were in conditions that were most conducive to natural peace.

And then we have, in recent months, been taking it to an interesting funky place. So he would watch me do the Wim Hof training and I'd be putting my hands in ice buckets and doing this interesting breathe work in cold water. And he would initially watch and then come over and stick his finger in, put his hand in.

So there's this great moment a couple months ago. We were out romping in this huge snowstorm, and Jack about 10 minutes into it...we'd just gone on this long search for the right carrot to put on it, to make the snowman with, for the nose.

And then Jack, he was in this huge drift and he got his boots just loaded up with snow, and he looked at me and he said "DaDa my feet are cold. My boots are filled with snow, but that's OK I'll just do the Wim Hof and make them warm." And then I looked at him.

And we played for an hour and a half after that. Feet just covered with snow and he was completely fine, never mentioned it again. And then he got increasing interested in this internal terrain, and we would take hot baths together. We take a bath together every night and then he would want to turn on the cold shower and get in it.

And then we'd play what we called the "It's so good" game. So we kind of reframe this thing...you know I have this...people tend to bounce off of discomfort whether it's mental or physical. Whether they run into internal resistance, whether it's in meditation training or someone exposing a weakness or if they are training and someone might be better than them. Whatever it is, they bounce away from things that might expose them.

**TF:**

They're repelled from it.

**JW:**

Right. Right. So the flip side of this is to learn...the way I talk about living on the other side of pain. Pain being mental or physical discomfort. And much of life that's so rich, comes from being on the other side of it. The other side of challenge. Internal or external challenge.

And with Jack, of course I'm not using that, but it's a little child's embodiment of it. We started to play with him turning on the cold water and he'd say, "It's so good Dada," and we'd kind of be in the hot bath and be in the cold and he's play in the cold and he'd say, "It's so good. It's so good."

And he began to have this gorgeous blissful smile meditating through it. And he'd say, "I'm meditating through it, it's so good." And we were reframing cold; cold was a metaphor for something that you bounce away from. It's something you can learn to sit with, to be neutral in, to find pleasure in...just like the weather.

And then we had this experience the other day where he said to me, "DaDa will you tickle me slowly?"

**TF:**

[laughs]

**JW:**

I always tickle him and he laughs uproariously. But we were lying in bed and I was tickling him very slowly and he said, "I'm going to do my meditation" and then he would meditate. And then the next day he said, "DaDa will you tickle me slowly," and I did it, and then he said "A little bit faster."

And I didn't suggest this to him, he suggested it to me. And then we played this game where we said 1 to 10. And I would tickle him slowly and he would start doing his meditation. And we'd move it from 1, 2 and we'd go up to 8 and he'd be doing his meditation and finally I'd be fully tickling him. Normally he'd be in hysterics, but he was sitting there meditating and not laugh. He found this so interesting.

He's now guiding the process in this beautiful way. And now we're turning it into talking...

**TF:**

Question, just to interject: did you at any point condition him to be proactive in that way or was it just an organic, "Now I'm in the driver's seat?"

**JW:**

I think I encourage him to grab the wheel all the time. A huge part of my relationship to parenting, and this is from my mom, and I watch my mom with Jack, and I think this may be the greatest gift that my mom gave me, is having this sense of agency in the world. The idea that having...having a sense that I can impact the world and that my compass really matters.

So when I grew up I wasn't "Seen but not heard." When I was 5 or 6 years old they were having adult conversations with friends and I was part of it. They wanted to hear my ideas and I felt that they mattered.

That's a big part of how my wife and I believe in raising Jack. And so he plays an active role in really everything that we do and so it was sort of a natural thing. It was all fun and play; I wasn't pushing any of these things on him at all. This is stuff that he wanted to do.

But I've been kind of blown away by how he's been transferring this stuff over. I mean, lateral thinking or thematic thinking, the ability to take a lesson from one thing and transfer it over to another...I think it's one of the most important disciplines that any of us can cultivate or "ways of being."

And that's something that Jack had from a really young age. We began to cultivate this from when he was really small around this principle of "Go around." The first time it happened, he was really tiny. He was trying to get in...we were in a little singular cottage on Martha's Vineyard. Tiny little cottage in a big field, and he was trying to get in one door and he couldn't, but he could get in the other door. And I said, "Jack go around." And then he looked at me and he went around.

And then "Go around" became a language for us physically: if you can't go one way you go around to another way. But then it became language for us in terms of solving puzzles, in terms of any time you run into an obstacle, go around. And then, working with the metaphor of go around, it opened up this way in which we would just have this dialog around connecting things: taking a principle from one thing and applying to something else. We've had a lot of fun with that.

So it's fascinating to see this game little dude have this thematic driven dialog, principle driven dialog, cultivating somatic awareness, cultivating the ability to feel these little ripples inside. Jack's telling me his dreams in this

beautiful way. He tells me how his emotions feel in his body.

It's a great journey. I'm learning so much from him.

## Fixed vs Growth Mindset

**TF:**

There's a book you've mentioned to me a number of times. Or at the very least, it's a researcher and I'm probably going to massacre this name as well...is it Carol Dweck? Mindset

**JW:**

Yeah. Mindset by Carol Dweck. Fixed or entity theories of intelligence vs incremental or growth mindset. Carol Dweck's one of the most important foundational developmental psychologists I think, around this distinction of a fixed perspective on how good somebody is...

Let's frame it like this: most children are education, unfortunately, to believe that they have a certain ingrained level of ability in things

**TF:**

[like] "You're smart, you're dumb, you're average."

**JW:**

Right. And they're told...and the sad thing is even when they are praised, they are told how smart they are or "You're such a good writer. You're so good at math."

And the kids will say, "I'm smart at this," or "I'm dumb at that." [The fixed perspective is that] But if you're very smart at one thing, then that means that if you fail then that means that you must be dumb at it.

And so it becomes very static. And the kids are often quite brittle. They have a fixed mindset. Or an entity theory of intelligence.

Well a growth mindset or a mastery oriented mindset is one where we understand that the path to mastery involves incremental growth, right? We don't have an ingrained level of ability at something we're going to have successes and failures, we're going to work at things. It's work. It's practice. And it's an open-mindedness to life experiences that makes us succeed.

**TF:**

How would the praise differ?

**JW:**

You would praise a kid for the process vs the outcome. And so you would say "I'm so proud of how hard you worked at your math," not "You're so smart at math."

Or if someone has a failure, the other side of it is not to say "Don't worry about it, you're just not good at math you'll do something else," it's to say, "How can we practice at this to get better?"

And so we're focusing on the process and not the outcome. That's like the fundamental principle. And it's so easy to say it, but it's very hard for people to live it as parents, especially if they don't embody it themselves.

What you see often with parents and kids is that the parents are fundamentally fixed. They have an entity theory of intelligence themselves. They're fixed. They're stuck. But they've read the material of Carol Dweck or somebody else and they want to parent their kids around the growth mindset, but the kids see what they embody not what they say.

So we have to embody it. I mean, one of the most important things I think that we do with my foundation, and I work with schools and programs around the world, is that when we're working with teachers, it's not just "This is the material you should teach your students. It's working with these core principles and embodying them [yourselves] first."

And then, through that embodied intelligence, working with the kids on how they can embody it. They have to walk the talk.

**TF:**

Let's go back to what you said we should go back to at some point, which is somatic sensitivity. Those sort of dimples of light in the darkness that most people overlook.

How do you train that?

## Training Somatic Sensitivity

**JW:**

Well, thematically the first thing I would say is that when you're thinking about cultivating an internal locus of control or an internal orientation vs an external one...

...So an artist we have all these external pressures on us. Let's say for example... let's talk about investors again. Let's say an investor is running a \$1 billion investment vehicle and they have partners, people who invest in it.

They have to write investment letters. They have all their partners, say they have 30 or 40 or 50 partners who are institutions, maybe endowments, educational endowments, charities or whatever...who have put their money into this investment vehicle.

And maybe that person has his or her own money as well in this investment vehicle. Well for them to be successful they have to operate from the inside out. They have to bring out the essence of who they are, as a performer, like we're discussing.

Or as a human being, they have to bring that out through their art. But if they are constantly feeling pressured, by what others expect from them, what others want from them, how they'll be perceived, or how people are looking at their Facebook posts or how their tweet is being responded to.

Tweet...that's what is it is right?

**TF:**

[laughs] That's...that's right.

**JW:**

I mean, it's so interesting for me, watching people watch their Instagram accounts. I see it with buddies all the time. And it's natural, it's completely human. But then we're aware of how we're perceived.

One of the major reasons I stay away from these things is that I can feel how susceptible I am to this stuff. You publish a book and it's on Amazon, it's so hard not to go look at the Amazon numbers, right?

And then a book comes out, and you're tracking them, even if you know it's ridiculous and you shouldn't be doing it.

Now someone like you, you're such a world-class... and you've so systematically trained at and cultivated the ability to market these things. This is actually a very important scientific input for you, it's not for most authors.

For most authors, it's an addiction. It's a completely different point in my opinion. You're actually gathering data and using it. Most people are just constantly feeling...

**TF:**

Tapping the vein.

**JW:**

Right. Tapping the vein. So with investors, what this often relates to is P&L checking. Profit and Loss checking.

So most investors are checking P&L hundreds of times per day. In fact it's constantly because it's on their screen all the time. And so it's like having these little adrenal hits all the time.

Whether it's dopamine or cortisol. Whether they are making money or losing money. They are constantly bouncing off of these things. The ultimate external orientation.

So if you think about internal + proactive vs external + reactive...this is how I( would tend to frame this out. We want build a proactive life that fundamentally moved from the inside out. Versus a reactive way of life where we're constantly reacting to all of these inputs which we may or may not want and where we're constantly beleaguered by or oppressed by a sense of how we're going to be perceived. Social pressures.

And so then you're talking about a really high level artist who might have a really subtle intuition about something and they should listen to that intuition. Or they should deconstruct that intuition and investigate it and see if it's the right way to go.

But they're aware that intuition might not be perceived as impressive by others. The problem is, the others usually aren't world-class artists, they're the arm-chair professors. They're the philosophologists.

And so you have the man in the arena who compromised by a self of self-consciousness by how the critics are going to perceive him or her.

Which is ridiculous.

It's like an A-player thinking about the approval of a C-player.

And that's disastrous.

That's external orientation.

That's like thinking that we're going to get food poisoning from something, that something's off and then dismissing it because of...

I mean first of all there's incredibly subtle sense just how strong the intuition is, right? I mean no one else at that table there...and we had some high-level dudes sitting at that table...had that feeling that we were about to eat something that had food poisoning. So it was very subtle.

You had a very subtle sense, it wasn't banging you over the head. And then there are the feelings of the social pressures and everything, right? Just an interesting subtle example.

But the subtle pressures were louder in that case, than the really subtle intuition that you had.

And then there's the attitude of, "I don't care about the social pressures." That's really hard, right?

**TF:**

Which I was able to do a third of the way through, but not before.

**JW:**

But you did. I think you're actually really, in my observation, you're really evolved with this. I mean you have so much external pressure and external awareness on you. I consistently find it stunning and impressive how you're able to embrace your funk and to live a life attuned to your inner ripples.

I think it's actually rather unique. I think it's a core strength of yours in my opinion.

**TF:**

Thanks man. I think that one element that's been very helpful in trying to mitigate the risks and dangers in the sort of paradox of trying to be introspective while having a very public facing life... is stoicism.

And I remember reading at one point, I want to say it was Cato who was considered by his contemporaries and his kind of, "successors in Stoic thought-leadership" to be the perfect Stoic in a lot of respects. And, I'm going to get the colors wrong here, but he would purposefully wear a blue tunic as opposed to a purple tunic to encourage people to ridicule him because he wanted to be embarrassed about those things only worth being embarrassed about.

So [he was] training himself not to be overly sensitized to the critiques of the C-players around him. And so I constantly...I remember for instance, this is such a silly example but...[laughs]...I was just in Montana and I went into the ski shop to get some light gloves just for walking around in, not for skiing.

And I looked at the whole rack and I went "Ooo I like these" and they were the most ridiculous Dr. Seuss striped nonsense gloves you've ever seen. Just like...they will not match with anything. Just ludicrous looking.

And I ask the woman at the front desk, I'm like "What do you think of these or should I get a different one?" And

she's like, "Neh, I think you should get the black ones."

I thought about it. I sat there and I thought about it. I was like, "Nope, I'm getting the Dr. Seuss Gloves." And so I got the Dr. Seuss gloves. And that expresses itself for me in a lot of different places because I will for instance do (and this is not something I recommend to everybody. So Caveat Emptor you're in control of your own life. So if you do this, you can face some dire consequences) but I'll do drunk Q&As on Facebook. I'll have a bunch of booze and I'll go on and I'll do a Q&A. And something will come out that will embarrass me, but it's not going to be life destroying.

And so it's kind of systematically creating an environment in which I feel like I don't have a reputation to protect, which is another reason I talk about the psychedelics and I'll talk very openly about monogamy vs non-monogamy.

And I'll throw these things out there to basically ensure:

A. That I never become a politician and

B. That I don't feel like I have a fixed identity to cling to that I need to protect

Because I see how disastrous that can be.

**JW:**

That's really powerful and you know, the fire of competition plays that role as well. When you look at people who compete. Let's talk about martial artists.

So I own a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu school with Marcelo Garcia. We've discussed Marcelo a lot.

**TF:**

And just as a side note, you mentioned creating chaos and training yourself to operate optimally in chaos compared to others. And of course Marcelo, who is 9x World Champion, is the master of the scramble.

**JW:**

Yeah, they call him the King of the Scramble. He is the greatest transitional player in the history of the sport maybe. He's incredible.

I mean the essence of his game is to not hold and allow people to move, and to again, embrace the chaos and get there first. He has just cultivated the transition so systematically that he has 10 frames in transition where somebody else will just be moving from one position to the next. And that transition itself, is something like...that's his ocean. It's a beautiful thing to see.

But if you look at the school, Marcelo runs the school so beautifully. And we've got at this point, a lot of world-class competitors. A lot of the school tends to win pretty much all the tournaments.

A lot of the guys who you've trained with...

**TF:**

With the Tim Ferriss Experiment. [Laughs] that was hilarious. Day 1 I'm like, "OK, I think I broke my rib"

**JW:**

[laughs] You did great man. You did great. I was proud of you. Guys you should check that out.

**TF:**

the TV show. If you want to see me get my ass handed to me and have a great time training with Jon Savata who is an incredible athlete and teacher. That's a TV show worth checking out.

**JW:**

Yeah Jon is fantastic. Well, if you look at the learning curve of the people in the school, the ones who put themselves on the line as a way of life just learn much faster than the ones who are just protecting their egos.

At most schools, what happens is, someone gets good and then they have to win to protect their status as being very good or dominant. Usually happens with martial arts instructors.

Which is that they reach a certain level, they open a school, they get a little bit older, they get a little fatter, and they have a reputation so they stop training because they don't want to be exposed by the young students who are coming up so they sit on the sidelines.

But their egos get increasing large but riddled with insecurity and this brittleness tends to then splay down to the students and then the whole school becomes a joke.

Versus Marcelo. The way Marcelo runs our school is so magnificent. Everyone is on the mat training so hard, as a way of life. Everyone is on a world-class growth curve. And it's very interesting to observe who the top competitors pick out when they are 5 rounds into the sparring session and they are completely gassed.

The ones who are on the steepest growth curve look for the hardest guy there. The one who will beat him up or who might beat him up. Others will look for someone they can take a break on. And so there's that constant search for exposure.

And that's kind of a parallel in terms of what you're describing about not having an ego to protect.

**TF:**

Or rather, a fixed identity [to protect].

**JW:**

Right. So this is a way as a competitor to constantly put yourself into the fire.

**TF:**

Here's a question I have for you, because I feel like particularly in jiu jitsu I could get better at this. You remember when we did that one day when we had the gi on and then you're like "Timbo, you're lips are purple." I thought I was going to die. I thought I was going to have a heat stroke and have to be carted off.

But do the guys...so is it correlation or causation...meaning...are the guys who on round 5 pick the hardest guy in the room, have they already self-selected by coming to this school in a sense, or did they start off perhaps, when they walked in the door, the guy who would pick the easiest person in the room at round 5 and have been converted into the guy who will pick the hardest person.

**JW:**

You see both.

**TF:**

You see both. In the latter case, how do they cultivate that transition?

**JW:**

I think that Marcelo is a great role model.

**TF:**

Because I think it's a fantastic metaphor for life right? I mean you need this everywhere.

**JW:**

100%. We think about this principle of cultivating quality as a way of life in the big things and little things.

[If] you look at the way that Marcelo runs that training environment, it's pretty exceptional.

**TF:**

He puts his ass on the line all the time.

**JW:**

His ass is on the line all the time. And he's getting a little bit older. He has 2 kids and he's a wonderful dad. His life is not just 100% jiu jitsu anymore.

He has all of these young 20s, at this point, world-class students who want to go at it hard with him and he goes at it hard with them and he wants to. He doesn't mind getting exposed.

He living it, but he's also creating an environment where people are present to quality in the little things. If someone doesn't have their gi on straight, or they haven't tied their belt, if they are sitting in a way that's sloppy...

**TF:**

What happens?

**JW:**

He tells them to straighten their gi

**TF:**

I love that.

**JW:**

When people are running and doing the warm if...if they are cutting the corner a little bit, he tells them to run the full circle.

If people are doing a certain drill in a sloppy way, he refines it. So it's the little things, right? If you watch Marcelo doing the warmup, there's a way he'll have his hand and just brush against the mat as he passes it. You can feel him engaging his tactile feeling for room.

He's someone who embodies and teaches quality as a way of life. So if you are in your 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> round and you are looking for a way out, you feel that you are fundamentally violating this principle which you've been cultivating.

**TF:**

a tenet of the school.

# Fundamentals of How Josh Trains Someone

**JW:**

Right. And this is so important. A core part of how I train people is around the interplay of themes, principles, and habits.

The habits are what we can actually train at. The principles are what we're trying to embody. And so we'll train at 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 habits which are the embodiment of a core principle. But the idea is to burn the principle into the hundreds of manifestations [until] that principle becomes our way of life.

So in this case we're talking about Marcelo embodying the principle of quality in all these little ways. These little ways you could say don't matter but they add up to matter hugely.

**TF:**

Oh, I think the little things are the big things. Because we're a reflection...this might sound cliché but, it's like "How you do anything is how you do everything."

**JW:**

It's such a beautiful and critical principle. Most people think they can wait for the big moments to turn it on. But if you don't cultivate turning it on in life in the little moments (and there are hundreds of times little moments than big) then there's no in the big ones.

**TF:**

Yeah. So if people listening don't take anything else from this interview...I think that's so key to who you are and so key to why you've been good at what you've been good at. There's it right there.

I'm going to mangle another name since that seems to be one of our themes for the show this episode...Archilochus. But it was a quote (gotta be a Roman, maybe a Greek, who knows) who said:

"We do not rise to the level of our hopes, we fall to the level of our training"

So you can't just do one every 5 years waiting for the big event. You're not going to have the training necessary.

**JW:**

You know, as a principle that I've been thinking about a lot around parenting...you see so often, people with their second child are not as present, right?

And unfortunately people are often not present with their first child either. I was taking a walk yesterday with a dear friend of mine I central park at dusk and we were just talking about all the ideas we've been thinking about and we walked past this woman who had 3 children in a stroller, and was walking her dog, and the children were all talking to her and she was on the cell phone having a conversation with a friend.

And it wasn't a quick...it was like a long gossip conversation and I was just watching this. We were in this exquisite external environment...and the embodiment of distraction: 3 children and a dog, children all trying to pull her, but she was just in this other world.

We think about the distraction of parenting. And then you think about what often happens with parents with the

first child, they are completely tapped in because this is all new; they are present.

And the second child, they just relatively neglect. We see that all the time. I'm thinking about this a lot because we're about to have our second child. And so I'm thinking about how important is it to not take for granted the things that you've done right and think they'll just be there. Because they're not going to be there unless you're equally present.

And we see this in the martial arts. As someone who trains twice a day as a way of life for 10 years, training until they drop, and doing external training as well with strength and conditioning and stretching and everything else. And then they get to a place where they're consistently winning and they think they can train 7 times a week instead of 10 and that it'll be the same.

It's not the same. That slippage shows. There's something incredible about going into competition knowing that there's no way that anybody else trained as hard or as good or as smart as you.

So I'm not talking about training quantitatively, I've talking about training qualitatively. The confidence that comes out of knowing, in any discipline that you're at, that you gave it your all.

When I work with someone I say that one of my many filters is looking at someone in the eye and saying that working with me is living as if you're training qualitatively as if in a world championship training camp.

Qualitatively.

But I look at them in the eye.

And some people you see a fear.

You see the fear of exposure.

Other people you see a lean in. An eagerness. A gameness. A hunger.

For what that exposure will lead to.

Those are 2 very very different paths.

Maintaining presence to that quality, even after we've assumed that we've got it nailed....

You see this with people around presence. There's so much bullshit in the meditation world, for example.

Because people might have meditated wonderfully for 4 or 5 or 8 or 10 years, but then they get ego involved with it. And then they put together schools and...they're not embodying it anymore.

And then it becomes hollow.

And they've kind of slipped from the philosopher to the philosophologist without even knowing that it happened. They weren't even present to the question.

# Firewalking Process

**TF:**

Firewalking Process.

**JW:**

Yeah, that's important.

**TF:**

What is the firewalking process? This is new to me too, I'm not sure I've heard you discuss this.

**JW:**

Yeah, this is something I've been really, for the last year and a half or so, developing intensely.

I think it's been a core part of my process for a long time. But training people I've been on this really intense learning curve on how to work with people on this.

So the core to the principle is that people tend to learn from their own experiences with much more potency than they learn from other people's experiences.

And the firewalking process is what I call, that's my term for a gateway to cultivating the ability to learn with the same physiological intensity from other people's experiences as we learn from our own.

For example, if you're a jiu jitsu fighter and you slightly overextend your arm and you get arm barred in Mundials, in the world championships. Your arm is being separated from your body. You feel like your shoulder is disconnecting, your arm is breaking. If you don't tap you're going to break.

So you have the combination. And often guys will fight it, right? They won't want to tap because it's the Worlds [championships].

So they'll have the combination of huge disappointment, all the adrenal reactions to being caught and wounded and maybe torn ligaments or tendons depending on how the injury sets in. Maybe a bone. And they will burn that lesson into themselves and they will not overextend their arm that way again, right? That's been burned in on an animalistic level.

But if they watch somebody fighting and they watch them overextend and get caught in an arm bar, that's just like nothing. It's an intellectual knowledge that has no impact on whether they'll overextend.

But if we can cultivate the ability to learn from other people's errors or experiences with the same intensity as we can learn from our own, it's unbelievable how that can steepen the learning curve.

**TF:**

What would be an example of that beyond jiu jitsu?

**JW:**

Well, for example, a really interesting live example that I'm playing with today is that we're working actively with investors...

A brilliant investor really used a term “The Pavlovian Impact” or the “Pavlovian influences” of growing up in a bull market. So most relatively young investors grew up in a post-2008 world. So all of their subtle responses have come from growing up in a bull market...

So for the most part they've experienced pleasure when they put their foot on the gas and they've experienced pain when they've taken their foot off the gas...for the most part. That's a bit oversimplified.

It's really interesting to sit down and think about all of the cognitive biases, all the subtle associations that come with growing up in a bull market. Now traditionally what people will say is that you have to live through certain business cycles...you have to...School of Hard Knocks, right? We have to learn from the pain of the other side.

But can you take a highly talented young investor who has grown up in a bull market...and give them the wisdom...you think about the journey from pre-consciousness to post-consciousness compared around a certain theme, and give them the wisdom of living through many market cycles when they haven't?

So then you can deconstruct systematically what does a bear market look like. Now I'm not sure if we're in the beginning of a bear market now, but let's just say we are maybe in the first or second inning of a bear market now.

Maybe we're in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> innings of a bull market. Maybe we're in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning of a bull market and we're going to see some huge round of [inaudible: intervention? Invention?] and we're going to go into extra inning of a bull market. No one really knows. Maybe there is some other dynamic at play. Even the great macro-economists don't know.

But they have a sense through deep study of either macroeconomics or valuation. But we are, at one point someday (relatively soon), we'll probably enter a bear market. So it's going to be very important [having the wisdom of living through many market cycles].

And so if you haven't lived through one, one thing you can do is to deconstruct what a bear market looks like and you can have them firewalk it.

So what that means is, suddenly all of the...

And a bear market doesn't just mean going down...

It also means the subtle undulation of going down for 3 weeks and a really steep 2 week rally and then going down for 3 weeks and then a 2 week rally.

So people often... even bear... people who are betting... think the market will go down get really hurt in bear markets because it's violent. There's a volatility to it.

**TF:**

Volatility. Yeah.

**JW:**

Right? So the question is, how can, in this case, an investor who's grown up in a post-2008 world firewalk market cycles so that he can burn that wisdom into himself or herself.

And then the question is how do you do this, right? So a lot of the things that we discussed around physiological awareness, somatic awareness, and cultivating sensitivity to what's happening inside of us...what comes with that is the ability to switch state, emotionally, adrenally.

And so if we visualize (with tremendous potency) something very painful to us, we can have a physiological response to that.

**TF:**

True even of exercise training. People who take a 10 minute meditation or visualization session, they get the benefits of the exercise (in large part) just from the visualization over 10 minutes.

*[Brief break, Josh has to go pick up his son from school]*

**TF:**

Firewalking. Visualization. Casts. Let's continue with firewalking.

**JW:**

Yes. You were just bringing up the physical dynamics that are possible with intense visualization.

I had this formative experience; I wrote about it years ago, where I broke my hands 7 weeks before national championship when I was training the Chinese martial arts push hands and I was in a cast for 6 weeks until up until, I think, 3 days the nationals and the doctor said I couldn't compete because everything was going to be atrophied.

But I was committed to doing it and it was really interesting because I was just doing all of my training one-handed and visualizing the weight work that I was doing on the one side passing over to the other.

**TF:**

Weight work? [You mean] resistance training?

**JW:**

Yeah. I was [also] doing my martial arts training one handed which was fascinating on its own to just work on being able to do with one hand what you can do with 2. That was tremendous.

But I was also visualizing the resistance training I was doing on the one side passing over to the other.

But really intense visualization, not just thinking it, but burning it into my...it's kind of what I mean by firewalking. The distinction between thinking about it intellectually sort of trying to visualize it versus burning it in...

**TF:**

With every sensory simulation.

**JW:**

Yeah, like with your whole spirit burning it in deeply. And it was fascinating to see when I took off the cast I had basically not atrophied. And I competed the next 2, 3 days later and won.

The doctors, they were pretty surprised by it. A lot of Western medicine was pretty surprised by it. They are close minded about these kinds of things.

**TF:**

What would you do to translate that to something less obviously physical? Like we were talking about training people who have never been through a bear market, to have the wisdom or lessons learned of those who have been through it.

So pragmatically, how do you simulate that? Do you have then interview someone who has gone through it and then try to have them relive those stories through visualization or what would the process potentially look like?

**JW:**

Yeah, so cultivation of empathy, to be able to do what you just described, very deeply, is one thing. To be able to, you know, live someone else's experience profoundly.

First of all we have to really be clear about the distinction between intellectual knowledge and somatic knowledge. When we're having something burned in, there's an adrenal response. So there's a physiology to having an experience very intensely.

We have to learn how to create that physiology. So we can do biofeedback training...undulating between states of physiological coherence and states of extreme stress so that we build up the ability to kind of move between them at will.

And then when we're studying the experience of, for example...somebody getting burned extremely, intensely time and again in a bear market (during the volatility, the ups and down of a bear market). You can look at it and it can feel like...like a chart. Or you can experience the anxiety that comes with it; the pain that comes with it. Like the shattering of your previous conceptual scheme.

You can almost firewalk the experience of the Pavlovian Influence of growing up in a bull market and then having that shattered. You can firewalk that shattering and then open your mind to the reality of the broader cyclicity over the long term.

And in terms of how you do it, well the foundation is in a lot of things we've been discussing:

- Intense meditation training
- Ways of becoming increasingly attuned to these subtle ripples inside of body
- Stilling your waters
- Having a lifestyle that is less reactive and less input addicted
- Being really aware of how we fill space addictively in life.
  - Whenever there is empty space we just fill it as opposed to maintaining the emptiness. And the emptiness is where we have clarity of mind and the perception of these little micro-ripples inside of us.
- Cultivating the ability to observe (in us and in others) the subtlest undulations of quality or of physiology

## The Importance of Building and Maintaining “Slack”

**TF:**

You and I talk a lot about maintaining slack. Trying to build slack into the system. And how important that is.

I was told by someone I respect a lot recently, “find the silence because you have to listen from the silence” and that might sound very vague, but I found that if you really meditate on it, it can apply to just about anything.

I mean if you really want to separate the signal from the noise, you need the space to do that.

**JW:**

Right. It’s such an important principle.

[Brief break to tend to Josh’s son]

**JW:**

We’re talking about slack while the slack is running out of the system here.

**TF:**

[laughs]. Very impassioned cries from upstairs.

**JW:**

Yeah, our aim was to do this while Jack was in school.

**TF:**

And fortune intervened. Changed our plans

**JW:**

Yes. You know, this principle of slack is so interesting. For me, a lot of it relates to the empty space for the learning process. In my way of life...I’ve built a life around having empty space for the development of my ideas for the creative process. And for the cultivation of a physiological state which is receptive enough to tune in very very deeply to people, to people I work with.

And so I see how I could triple the amount of people I work with very easily with the systems that I have, but my growth curve would change fundamentally. My internal physiological training would take a hit. I wouldn’t have enough time for meditation, reflection afterwards...for the development of thematic takeaways from every session that I have.

In the creative process it’s so easy to drive for efficiency and take for granted the really subtle internal work that it takes to play on that razor’s edge.

**TF:**

I think in part it comes back to the limiting of inputs and selective ignorance that you talked about. Because if you triple the number of clients you have in a high-tech and high-touch business you’re going to have to juggle 17 chainsaws instead of 2 chainsaws.

# Quality's Effect on Navigating the Razor's Edge and Big Waves

**JW:**

Right. Then \*I'm\* reacting and I'm not embodying the core principles that we're working on. And so much of really high-level training, I find, is sort of somatic transmission. You're embodying a certain state and then you're helping someone embody that state as well.

**TF:**

Totally agree. And I think that if you want a good example of that, just as a relatively new dog owner as an adult, you can look at dogs or children who are fundamentally unblocked in that somatic reading ability and you can see just as you said...that apparent transmits their state of being to their child. Despite, or with the assistance of, whatever they might say.

Similarly, if you're interacting adult to adult, you need to return to that state to be maximally effective, and what you do in particular.

**JW:**

Right. And then when we're talking about sort of dancing on the razor's edge...when you're moving up the growth curve in a certain discipline, there are a lot of things you can do to reach the first 80<sup>th</sup> or 90<sup>th</sup> or 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of something.

When you're talking about the last .001%, you're talking about these arenas where the greatest insight will be right next to the greatest blunder. And you have to be willing to go RIGHT ON that razor's edge.

I was having this great conversation with a sports psychologist Michael Gervais a couple weeks ago, and he used the language of "thrusting into big waves." [This was] the experience he had to go into to push himself as a surfer to thrust into big waves. I love that expression.

But of course if you're thrusting into big waves, then you can easily push yourself into the wave you shouldn't take. So big wave surfers have to be able to navigate that most finely tuned...in the moment just...intuitive decision making process of whether the moment is just right or whether it's the moment that will kill you.

And then if you're working with people as a coach or a trainer of people who are navigating that terrain...you have to be in a state where you can navigate that terrain. You have to have an embodied state there.

And I think that's a mistake that a lot of people make in everything that they do...they just scale...scale and dilute quality. And then when you lose quality you lose the ability to successfully navigate the razor's edge and then, by definition you're probably more destructive than you are helpful.

And so when I think about training people who are in that place, it's like 99.9% listening and ideally you can make the most potent suggestions with the lightest touch feasible.

# Using Scarcity As A Discipline To Improve

**TF:**

So the notes...I took some notes beforehand here...and one of them touches on the principle of scarcity in A) habit creation and B) the learning process and C) the creative process. I don't know if we'll have time to get into all of these right now, but could you just elaborate on the principle of scarcity.

**JW:**

So if we think about the idea of subtraction or essentialism or scarcity... You frankly, are as good as it gets in my opinion at harnessing the principle of scarcity in your learning process, learning how to deconstruct something and focusing on absolutely what's most essential and zone in on it. As opposed to just throwing huge amounts of resources at things and just having diluted quality of approach.

Most people, when they become successful they have the opportunity to have more resources and they keep on layering more and more resources on things, so they're not very potent in how they go about things.

If you cut those resources down 99%, then you find yourself just zoning in on what's most essential. And then if you can learn to add resources incrementally [while] maintaining that potency, it's incredible that you can do.

But it takes a lot of discipline to maintain that principle of scarcity. So in habit creation, taking on the right amount and not too much. Not too little but not too much.

People tend to think about layering on...they get excited when they realize.. If I go through a diagnostic process with somebody and we realize there are 10 areas they could take on, they want to take on all of them at once. You can really only take on 1 or 2 things at once. Ideally it's 1 theme and you take on 2 or 3 manifestations of that theme to burn that theme on and then you keep on layering.

In the creative process, we've been talking about limiting inputs...

**TF:**

Positive constraints, yeah.

**JW:**

Positive constraints. Listen, me speaking about this principle to you, I mean you embody this principle profoundly.

What are your thoughts on it?

**TF:**

Well, there are a few things, just to maybe add a couple of anecdotes to what you just said.

The first thing that came to mind was a quote (and I'm going to butcher this, but) it's from Jack Ma of Alibaba who said, "In the beginning, we had an advantage. We had no experience, no business plan, and no money. So it forced us to make all of our decisions very carefully."

And I do think that people tend to (and I'm also borrowing this) overestimate what they can accomplish in a week and underestimate what they can accomplish in a year. Which leads to theoretically appealing decisions like trying to adopt 10 new behaviors at once that are kind of "hour wise and year foolish" in the sense that they are doomed to

fail from the outset in many respects...

And to your point also about scaling. I have friends who call this the S-word because it's a romanticized, sort of worshipped notion in Silicon Valley. "Scale scale scale. Gotta be bigger. Hire more people. Ship more product." And if you are looking to optimize your craft, your art, that may or may not be the right path to doing that.

To my mind, you can look at exemplars, or example of people who have scaled and are still critics of scaling. In the sense that Bill Gates I believe said, "If you add people to an inefficient process, it just makes the problem worse. You have to add people to an efficient process."

To that end, whether you are looking to build a "lifestyle business," a healthy cash flow based business that represents in some way, your craft...let's just say that you make (and this is a real example) 20 customized rifles a year and that's all you do. And you sell to the top .001% of marksmen in the United States and you never ship more than that; that's the constraint you apply.

Whether you're trying to do that or build Microsoft, that lesson can apply. Whether it's adding 1% or the next 1,000 people.

So for me, I think it's very easy to create a false dichotomy in your mind, when you look at, say...a small scale craftsman who's perhaps making oil paintings in rural Alaska vs a startup in Silicon Valley with a 1,000 employees and think of them as totally different, but in fact if you look at the top performers in either environment they'll have a lot in common with each other.

And I think one of those commonalities is applying a lot of positive constraints. Even when you have an embarrassment of resources available.

**JW:**

If you think about this in terms of the creative process, one of the most important things to train is the ability to ask the right question; to know where to look.

If you look at people in most creative fields who extremely high-level vs incrementally lower fields, it's knowing what the most critical area is for thinking.

[Break to get Jack something to play with]

## The Importance of Surfacing to Reflect on Thoughts, Actions, Patterns, Beliefs, etc.

**JW:**

Continuing to think about this principle of scarcity, one of the ways that I have myself trained at this in the creative process, or harnessed the principle of scarcity is (and I have everyone who I work with, live in this routine) is forcing yourself at the end of each day, is to think about what the most important question is, in what you're working on.

We discussed this last time. It's really interesting because you're studying complexity all the time and if you're a really high level thinker, you're slicing through it like butter but there are usually 1 or 2 or 3 areas of stuckness.

And most people I find, tend to live in the creative process by kind of “surfacing,” deciding where they want to go, putting their head down, and just grinding their way toward it and just surfacing later on...

But they don't surface enough to reflect on what's the most potent direction to go. Think about the human vs the computer playing chess 10 years ago, now the computers are getting really good at knowing where to look but 10 years ago the human knew that 1 or 2 or 3 of these directions was the right essential direction. Intuitively we sensed that and we cultivate the ability to know where to look...but the computer had to look at everything.

If we look at everything, then we're operating like really really bad computers. But if we cultivate the ability to ask the most potent question systematically...so how do we do this?

Well we have a routine where we end each work day thinking, “What's the most important question in what I'm doing right now?” Pose the question to the unconscious and wake up first thing in the morning and brainstorm on it.

**TF:**

Do you have then pose it again?

**JW:**

No. Actually I think it's pretty important not to do that because then we are kind of consciously ruminating on it. Hopefully they haven't thought about it for a few hours before they go to bed. This is something that Hemingway wrote about in his writing process really beautifully.

**TF:**

Yeah, Hemingway would stop writing mid-sentence and provide a foothold for continuing the next day.

**JW:**

Right, which we could also look at from that “Internal vs external” framing. If you're kind of held by a sense of guilt whenever you're not working, then you're going to feel like you have to write everything that you can write. But if you're nurturing your creative process from the inside-out you're going to be comfortable stopping with a sense of direction, even when you're mid-sentence or mid-paragraph.

**TF:**

When I talk to people who have started journaling successfully for the first time, the most consistent pattern that I see is, “I write less than I feel I can each day.”

They are never pushing to max capacity or feeling like they are pushing to max capacity. They always write less than they feel they should write.

**JW:**

Right. That's very interesting. And then...if we think about taking this and then turning it into a systematic training of the ability to be potent in the creative process...[for example]...if we're working on a given project and reflecting on what's the most important question here and then we're journaling on it in the brainstorm in the morning...

We're doing a lot of things. We're opening the channel systematically between the conscious and the unconscious mind. We're waking up in the morning and beginning our day proactively; all of these things which we discussed in the past.

But then if you sit back, after say, a month and look back at your 3 or 4 or 5 journals, brainstorms, Q&As on a given subject...and you think about, "So in the moment this is what I thought was most potent, but now I realize THIS in fact, would have been most potent. What's the gap?"

Deconstruct the gap between your understanding then and your understanding now; then design your training process around deconstructing that gap and [then] training at what that gap revealed. It's a really powerful way for individuals...

**TF:**

...Right. What assumptions underlied [sic] that gap...the creation of that gap or that blind spot?

**JW:**

Right. That misconception about what was most important. So you're training yourself, day in and day out like water, to be an increasingly potent thinker. And this is manifesting scarcity in that we are forcing ourselves, no matter how many resources we have to think about what is the most important question we're working on right now.

**TF:**

Do you journal every day?

**JW:**

Yes.

**TF:**

When do you journal?

**JW:**

Well I journal throughout. So I'll wake up in the morning meditate...take a cold then hot cold undulation shower, meditate and then I will journal.

I've had periods where I'll move right...especially when I was working on lucid dreaming...where I'd move straight from sleep into journaling. But that's my rhythm today [the above paragraph is].

And then when I have insights throughout the day, I'll do quick journals about them. And then after I have sessions with clients I'll do a journaling session on the most important takeaways.

**TF:**

Do you do that in a notebook or do you do it digitally.

**JW:**

I do it on Evernote and then I tag everything thematically, which is hugely important for me. I have all of my journals and all of the resources that I find valuable, tagged thematically and [tagged] through habits in the language of my training process.

So this is incredibly powerful for being able to give people resources, for me reviewing the ideas without having recency bias impede how I communicate.

**TF:**

Can you say that one more time?

**JW:**

So if I have a client who I think has to work on a certain theme and I want to give them resources they can read on it, I can just click on the tag in Evernote and all of the resources—things that I've written and things that I've read, circling that theme, are right there.

**TF:**

Got it.

**JW:**

And it's also really powerful because it's really hard to overcome recency bias.

**TF:**

I see, recency bias...meaning like the primacy and recency effect. So you're recalling what you read most recently not necessarily the best resource.

**JW:**

Right, and not necessarily [recalling] my foundation to the theme and you want to communicate it from what someone has learned from the foundation up. So it's really powerful, the tagging on Evernote...I'm not a big tech wizard as you know but...

**TF:**

Just to put this into perspective, Josh was looking for Dinosaur Train for like 10 minutes and he's like, "You know what, I think I'm going to search this thing" [laughs] and then I say, "And you say you're not good at tech."

**JW:**

[laughs]

**TF:**

[Laughs] That was a big discovery. And then Jack goes, "There goes dinosaur train." Amazing how this search function works.

Ahh, should we talk about thematic interconnectedness?

## Thematic Interconnectedness

**JW:**

Yes, let's talk about it. I'd love to talk about it in the context of education a little bit. This is one of the...

Thematic interconnectedness is...maybe that's the essence of my relationship to the world or beyond. I think you and I, in some of our eccentric conversations all over the world, on surf boards and wherever else, this has been a big topic for us.

**TF:**

Constant topic.

**JW:**

And it's been a huge part of how I've approached learning; from my foundation in looking at the relationships between chess and life, learning about life through chess, then in transferring that over from chess into the martial arts; first Chinese martial arts and then into Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

And then when I work with people, it's really how I learn and how I found it's really powerful to help people amplify their growth curves; to teach them to be able learn the many from the few or from the 1. To learn the macro from the micro. Breakdown the boundaries between disparate pursuits or parts of life between the personal, the professional, the technical, and the psychological.

And if we have an experience where we're on surf boards and we have some little thematic breakthrough and we can apply it to every other aspect of our life, it's really interesting what can happen, because we're pretty well calloused over in our areas of strength. But in areas where we're less advanced, we can be more raw and [it's] more conducive to breakthroughs sometimes.

**TF:**

Oh, 100%. I mean, you can see things with [Beginner's Mind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoshin) because you have no other choice [laughs]. You don't have to try to simulate Beginner's Mind because you already are a beginner. It's like the race to the bottom experience.

So for those wondering what the hell that means, the "race to the bottom," is an expression that Erik of Paddle Woo, our paddle surfing instructor, uses to refer to constantly dropping in board size often measured in liters for buoyancy purposes.

And Josh and I, and everyone who was there really, very quickly realized, to use your experience, that you are "dancing on the razor's edge" and trying to find a balance between the race to the bottom but also maintaining motivation so you're not just slipping on banana peels for 5 hours straight and to what extent do you focus on the board size and the race to the bottom vs which gives you more maneuverability in surfing vs actually working on say...the footwork and the other technical aspects on a board that you can manage.

**JW:**

And it's very interesting to think about this theme of the "race to the bottom" combined with this other wonderful principle that we were all talking about with Erik, which is, the swapping of boards between.

So he had these camps where he had the 18 top stand up paddle surfers in the world together with him, all riding these ridiculously small boards that are deep underwater when you're standing on them and it's incredibly hard to balance on these things.

So they've internalized this race to the bottom theme deeply which we are working on [laughs]. And then they also...they had this experience where they were all together and initially it was sort of competitive but then it became much more collaborative and they were just sharing ideas. And then they began to swap boards.

And they began to have this interesting experience where every surfboard kind of carved its own lines. There's the practitioner who carves his own lines and then there's also the board that has a unique rocker who finds new lines in the wave. And what these guys would find is that swapped boards they could see new lines in the wave if they listened to the board.

Some guys would swap boards and try to force the new board to carve their lines. Others would sort of be open to what this new board could do. And then they would learn from it. And then they'd go back to their boards and their minds would open up.

So that's another way of thinking about this Beginner's Mind. The new board forced them...helped them see new lines if they were open minded enough.

So this is an example of thematic interconnectedness. So when I came back from our previous trip where we were talking about the swapping boards theme and I came back and I was red-hot on fire with how to apply this theme in the investment process with my guys.

So you have these teams that are so private and so magnificent at what they do, but if you could get teams to mix and share ideas with abundance...For example if a world-class portfolio manager could swap analysts with another PM for a week or 2 or 3 would be interesting...if they were both open truly...everyone was sharing openly...you'd be able to do the equivalent of swapping boards and seeing new lines.

It's forcing the beginner's mind. But forcing the beginner's mind not only with an open-mindedness but also tapping someone who is truly exceptional at a very different style of what you do.

So there's an example of just having an experience in surfing and applying it to something else.

**TF:**

And converting it potentially into a simple question right? Like "where can I swap boards?" ...Could be something that is used for fodder, for people listening, in a journaling exercise. Wake up, meditate, have your coffee, sit down and drop that question at the top.

**JW:**

That's a magnificent brainstorming question to journal and riff on. I love it.

**TF:**

So how do you apply that to education?

**JW:**

So this thematic interconnectedness, I don't think that we can do much more important work with children than helping them [to] love learning, help them learn to bring out the essence of who they are in the learning process [which is to say] to express the core of who they are through learning, which obviously will help them love learning.

And then help them discover thematic interconnectedness...how the world is interconnected via principles, themes...people are silo'ed right now. People think about disciplines in an increasingly data-driven...

**TF:**

Segregated way

**JW:**

...Segregated way and a close-minded way and it's kind of heart breaking. And so...I have this non-profit I've been running for a lot of years and a huge amount of what we do...

And a huge amount of what we do...all of our work is in education. We've got hundreds of programs around the world, most in the U.S. but internationally as well. [www.TheArtofLearningProject.org](http://www.TheArtofLearningProject.org) is our website. The programs that are most exciting to me are the ones where we really are systematically working with schools to help children experience thematic interconnectedness.

And so the way that we'll do this, for example, is that we'll be working with 5 teachers in 5 different subject matters...well 4 or 5 or 6 or whatever the number is, in the same age group...

You're smiling at me, what are you thinking?

**TF:**

[laughs] Sorry guys, I was just looking at the URLs, theArtofLearningProject.org and I was laughing because I remembered when we filmed the TV show and we were walking up the stairs to the Marcelo Garcia gym and you kept on saying "TAOL this, TAOL that" and I thought you were saying towel, t-o-w-e-l and I'm like, "What the f\*\*\* is TAOL?"

And you're like, "It's my godd\*\*\* book!" And you got all upset and I'm like, "Oooh, The Art Of Learning...how did you expect me to piece that together?"

Anyway that's why I was smirking. [laughs]

Now I know the acronym and I won't anger Josh any further.

**JW:**

[laughs] You didn't anger me.

**TF:**

I know, I'm just f\*\*\*ing with you.

**JW:**

So anyway...I don't remember that conversation

**TF:**

TAOL, TAOL, TAOL for like 5 flights of stairs and I'm like, "What the f\*\*\* are you talking about?" [laughs]

Anyway...My bad.

**JW:**

So the way that we do this is, that we have, for example, 5 different teachers in different subject matters working with my team to weave the same principle of learning into...for example...math, English, history, social studies, volleyball, soccer...at the same time.

So you'll have kids who are studying their subject matter but they are studying also the way a principle of learning or the creative process of performance psychology in each of these disciplines at the same time. And so they are by definition, breaking down the walls between these different pursuits.

And it's really interesting systematic way of doing this. So they will be studying the same principle in math, then

they move to the next subject and they're experiencing it through another lens and then through another lens... And they are experiencing it in sports.

**TF:**

Are these borrowed from The Art Of Learning book? In so much as you're talking about smaller and smaller circles, you were talking about learning the macro from the micro...

**JW:**

Yes. The root of these are in core themes of learning, creativity, performance psychology that I wrote about in my book and that I've developed since. Yeah, absolutely.

And we've spoken about a lot them together. And so it's a kind of combination of individualized self-expression, well a lot of these themes that we've been discussing today and last time.

**TF:**

And so can people learn more about this at [TheArtOfLearningProject.org](http://TheArtOfLearningProject.org)?

**JW:**

They can. So everybody please come check out the site. We've got some really wonderful programs around the world and it's good timing for this right now because I'd love it if any educators out there... we're on the verge of launching about 10 really high level programs (is what we want to launch) all thematically driven. We're preparing them in the next months.

And so, anyone who is in the educational world who would love to touch base with us about applying for this kind of program, Katy on my team can be reached at [katy\[at\]jwfoundation\[dot\]com](mailto:katy[at]jwfoundation[dot]com). JW Foundation is the name of my non-profit that houses The Art of Learning Project.

**TF:**

What type of educators should check this out and email her?

**JW:**

Teachers. Or people running schools or school systems.

**TF:**

Any minimum number of students? Or any other parameters?

**JW:**

Well the essence of these programs would be a school system that's open minded around, for example, engaging teachers in different disciplines working at the same time in a collaborative way so that the kids can be embodying the same principle in a wealth of disciplines at the same time.

So that's the essence of it. It's a bit of a coordinated program. We've had wonderful success doing this and it's what really excites me when I think about education. How to build systematic training in creativity through thematic interconnectedness into the way kids learn these days.

Because kids get so excited when they see connections. This is a big part of what I'm experiencing as a dad with Jack is how red hot he gets when can he learn something and then can apply it to many other things.

This is a core part of my approach to learning and it's maybe my biggest strength: the ability to find hidden harmonies between disparate parts of life.

**TF:**

Seemingly disparate.

**JW:**

Right. Seemingly.

**TF:**

Well Josh, this is always so much fun, to drag you kicking and screaming out of your cage. [laughs]

**JW:**

You did it.

**TF:**

Or cave [laughs]

**JW:**

[laughs] I like cave more

**TF:**

...Cave more, I don't know why I was thinking cage. I guess that's my inner primate coming out, but people have asked me often about education following my TED talk, where at the end I talk about tackling different facets of education...

...And I feel like your approach and principle based lens through which you can not only spot but teach interconnectedness, is just so incredibly valuable in an educational system where fields are increasingly silo'ed and viewed as separate and you have political turf wars between departments and what not only exacerbates that's problem and I feel like this is a massively powerful step in the right direction.

So #1, thank you for that and #2, educators listening to this (or if you're just curious to check it out and might be able to help in some way): [TheArtOfLearningProject.org](http://TheArtOfLearningProject.org) and then if you get a taste of that and it seems compelling and you want to try to apply or jump into the fray, then [katy\[at\]jwfoundation\[dot\]com](mailto:katy[at]jwfoundation[dot]com)

[Talk about finding that info and more in the show notes]

But Josh, I would usually ask where people can find you online, but they can't find you so I won't ask that.

Is there anything you would like people to...besides visiting the resources we just mentioned...anything you would like people to take away, consider, do...any action...anything that comes to mind that you would like people to walk away with just as a closing comment or question?

**JW:**

That's a big question. Yes, absolutely. It's funny, as I sit with this now, for so many years my primary identity was as a fighter, a competitor. And I've transitioned in recent years and I find my primary identity now (self-identity), the way I experience myself, is as a nurturer of people: my family, the people I work very closely with, and children as I work more broadly in education.

And when I think about it through the context of nurturing people and nurturing ourselves, I think that we're living in a world of so much noise and so much distraction and of the space being constantly filled...that it's rather remarkable what can happen if we cultivate a mindfulness, a stillness of the waters as a way of life and we find the beauty in that.

There's so much beauty that can come from silence, we can learn so much by feeling the inner ripples of our internal experience.

And as parents, embodying what we want our children to embody. Living it. Walking the talk. Putting away our phones. Living a life of deep presence with our children, our student, with whoever we work with. Cultivating empathy. Cultivating compassion.

It scares the hell out of me how powerfully I see the world moving in another direction from this. And there's so much that we can learn from the speed of what computers can do, where AI is headed, what big data can reveal. It's thrilling to me...as long as we stay in touch with the essential parts of our humanity.

And when I experience what happens working with people...with adults or with children...when we're just completely present and we cultivate that presence as a way of life, it's incredible what can happen between people.

And when I experience the scars in children, that I see everywhere that comes from the anxiety, that comes from lack of secure attachment, the lack of the attunement of the parent, the lack of the embodiment of the parent or the teacher in these things that are spoken about...it's heartbreaking.

So maybe I'm really really old school, but there is something about the cultivation of deep presence and quality as a way of life which just rings all through me.

And honestly the other thing I'll say is that, after having the experience I had a few months ago, coming as close as you can come to dying...

First of all, on a tactical level, please...if anyone is experimenting with different forms of breath hold work like the Wim Hof method, which I think is very interesting and quite powerful...PLEASE don't do it in any water, even an inch of water. Because if you go out [unconscious] you don't want to be in water.

**TF:**

I should say, if you practice this stuff enough and you're a type A personality, you are going to go out. It's not just a high probability, it's almost a certainty that you're going to go out...and to think otherwise is really courting disaster.

So DO NOT do it in or near water.

**JW:**

Yeah. And when we talk about firewalking: living and learning from other people's experiences with the same physiological intensity that you can learn from your own...there's something about when you go over that edge, over that cliff...

If I could take the experience of love, gratitude, and beauty ever since I've had that experience and I could give it to

my brothers and sisters, holy smokes. I mean what a beautiful thing.

So if there is any way that we can live with that deep sense of beauty, it's a rich place.

**TF:**

To find the still...cultivate. Not just find, but create that stillness and practice, like you said, the calming of the waters...I think is, underestimated because of its perceived simplicity.

And just as not all things that are simple are easy...not all things that are simple are low in value. Sometimes what's right in front of you within grasp is most important to grasp onto and make use of. It doesn't have to be extremely esoteric.

**JW:**

And it's so easy to think we've got it nailed, you know? Like, we can meditate for 15 years and think that we've got presence now, then we stop meditating, 6 months pass and we're distracted.

It's...there's a constancy to it. And a presence to the real sense of danger that it can slip.

**TF:**

And speaking for me personally, it's also building it in as a habit, just like brushing your teeth (for those people who brush their teeth [laughs] )...

...In so much as, for me (and I know this is true for many of my friends...meditation doesn't really work well as a batched process.

In other words, meditating 10 minutes a day for 10 days is much for valuable than meditating once in 10 days for a 100 minutes.

And for most people it would be less painful too once you get into that habit and it becomes an ingrained part of your being and your practice. You will see the value, particularly once you have a critical mass. For me, it's typically 5 to 7 days.

And then I think, "I cannot believe I wasn't doing this." Or, "I can't believe I stopped for 4 weeks" It's incredibly valuable.

...And brother Josh...

**JW:**

Thanks brother, this was a blast.

**TF:**

Thanks buddy.