

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 148: Josh Waitzkin

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Tim Ferriss: Zdravstvuj, my cute little darlings. This is Tim Ferriss and welcome to another episode of The Tim Ferriss Show where, each episode, it is my job to deconstruct world-class performers from many different worlds – whether they come from military, entertainment, sports, or otherwise.

To dissect and collect the patterns for you that you can use. To tease out the routines, habits, thought processes, etc. that you can apply immediately and test in your own life. And this episode is a really 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, a 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 discuss 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 has a black belt under the phenom of nine-time world champion Marcela Garcia – or Tai Chi push hands – he's world champion. These days, he's spends his time coaching the world's top performers whether Mark Messier, Cal Ripken, Jr., or investors whose names you'd recognize or whose assets under management would blow your mind.

And, as contacts, I initially met Josh through his incredible book, "The Art of Learning," which I loved so much that I helped produce the audio book. You can find that as part of my book club on audible.com/timsbooks. And this episode is deep. Josh is always deep and he walks the talk in the best way possible. I hope it will blow your mind. We talk about achieving flow states, near-death experiences, use of slackline, training elite performers, cultivating sensitivity – and I don't mean that in the most boo-hoo way imaginable but, rather, the most practical way imaginable use heartrate variability training, high intensity interval training, breath awareness, etc. – intuition and its applications to investing, and it just goes on, and on, and on. So please enjoy my conversation with Josh Waitzkin.

[Intro music]

Tim Ferriss: Joshua.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes, Timbo?

Tim Ferriss: Welcome back, buddy. I am so happy to be here –

Josh Waitzkin: I'm thrilled you're here, man.

Tim Ferriss: – hanging with you. And I thought we could maybe start with a complete nonsequitor which is a book that you just mentioned to me – that I know nothing about – which is "Dreaming Yourself Awake." Can you talk about this?

Josh Waitzkin: Oh, I didn't think we were going to begin here. It's a book that I explored a couple years ago. About 20 years ago, I started studying Tibetan dream yoga and lucid dreaming – not deeply, but exploring. And this was during the period when I was first getting involved with my study of East Asian philosophy. And then a dear friend of mine recommended this book. It's actually funny because we made a mistake together. I recommended another book but he texted back confirming that it was the name. He texted me back that name that I didn't intend but then I picked up and read and it was extraordinary. It's just a phenomenal discussion, very systematic discussion of the art of lucid dreaming in this way that fuses East Asian philosophy with western science.

Tim Ferriss: And you were competing, then, at the time or were you not competing? You were in the midst of competition?

Josh Waitzkin: Two years ago, you mean?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, this was two years ago?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, this was two years ago.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I thought you said about 20 years ago. Sorry.

Josh Waitzkin: 20 years ago is when I started studying East Asian philosophy.

Tim Ferriss: I got it.

Josh Waitzkin: And I was competing in chess, then, and martial arts.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I need a little more caffeine. Working on it.

Josh Waitzkin: You've had a rough night.

Tim Ferriss: And I want to thank you – and this is Tim's stream of consciousness podcast intro – we're looking at a slackline. This is an indoor Gibbon classic slack. It's about 12 – no, not even – 10 feet long, maybe. It's surrounded by kettlebells an indo board and a triceratops – which I don't think is yours.

Josh Waitzkin: You've got the bosu ball there.

Tim Ferriss: And the bosu ball. And I wanted to thank you for actually getting me to bite the bullet and grab a slackline which is set up on Long Island.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, absolutely. I've had some fun on your slackline on Long Island, too. Right now, I'm in the period in that I oscillate between these.

And my son, Jack, who's four and a half, we have a great time. I'm on the indo board rocking it, he's on the bosu ball, we have to catch back and forth while on these things. We're always integrating these interesting kind of physiological awareness training.

Tim Ferriss: Speaking of which, I feel like maybe we should throw a cautionary tale into this fall podcast. So we obviously trade stories and findings all the time. Would you like to talk about your recent experience with Wim Hof and breathing training?

Josh Waitzkin: Wow. Yeah. I had an extremely scary experience. So I'm a lifetime meditator and experimental subject, like yourself, around all these things.

Tim Ferriss: You tend to have better self-preservation instincts.

Josh Waitzkin: I tend to, although I've had a lot of close calls in life. Well, when I heard you speak to Wim, I was extremely intrigued.

In fact, 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 sounds like a fascinating guy." I started digging into his work. He's so powerful and I started going through his online course. I loved it. The energetic feeling, the electric surging through the body. I'm also a lifetime freediver – since I was four or five years old, I've been freediving.

Tim Ferriss: And, just to put that in perspective, you spend about a month a year in the water.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. It used to be three months when I was younger. Now, it's about – Yeah, free diving, usually about a month of the year. But I spend a lot of time now, as we know, sento paddle surfing, swimming, diving. The ocean's a huge part of our life. We're got to talk about our sento paddle adventures soon, man, because those are pretty hilarious.

Tim Ferriss: We'll definitely come to that.

Josh Waitzkin: 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 that you're experiencing internally – it's very similar to training in Tai Chi Twan, movement meditation, for 10, 20 years and then, being an hour long into a session and you have this feeling of energetic flow inside your body. With Wim Hof, you do a few rounds of his breath method and you're experiencing these things and it was incredible. The gain and strength were mind-boggling. The length of the breath holds were fascinating. But then I made a big technical error. I ignored all the signs on Wim's site that you spoke about – do not do this in water – which were all over the place. But I thought, "Free diving's a way of life for me. No problem." And the major technical error was not realizing – which is absurd after a lifetime of free diving – that it's carbon dioxide buildup which gives you the urge to breathe and not oxygen deprivation. Hugely important thing – please, everyone, burn that in – it's CO2 buildup that makes you want to breathe. And so I did, after a long swim at the NYU pool a few months ago, I started doing my Wim breathing and did a series of underwater swims. I did about eight 25 meter swims.

And I think I was on my fourth 50, underwater – and 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 after blacking out from shallow water blackout for three minutes before someone pulled me out. And the doctors have told me usually it's 40 seconds to a minute to perhaps permanent brain damage, 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, I would have been gone.

Tim Ferriss: And, more specifically, you – correct me if I'm wrong – you didn't – and this strikes me as so odd – you didn't have the reflexive inhalation of water, is that right? You didn't take it in.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, I didn't take any water into my lungs, which is 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. And I was blue everywhere else. My body sent all the blood to my brain and my heart.

It saved my life and I'm here. But it was a life-changer, on a lot of levels. The idea of my four-year-old boy, four blocks away, sitting on the rug waiting for Daddy to come home and me unconscious on the bottom of a pool, blue, just that's the kind of experience that is shattering.

Tim Ferriss: How did that change how you think about training and these types of experiments or life, in general? I know that's a very broad question but –

Josh Waitzkin: I've been –

Tim Ferriss: How does it change your decision making, I guess?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. Well, first of all, how it's 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 the exquisite little ripples 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 little boy – my wife is pregnant, we have another son coming in June – and it's made me rethink these questions of risk. But, on the other hand, it's very important not to oversteer. The most important learning lessons that I've learned for myself in training elite mental performers is that people oversteer all the time. They overcalibrate. And so I've been very careful to sit with this and try to draw the right lessons out of it and not the wrong, and not too big of lesson, and not too small of lesson. So, for example, this was a huge technical oversight I had. I didn't realize I was taking a big risk, here. I've had a lot of big risks that I've taken

in my life – some with you – and I think I'm actually pretty good at navigating those but I've been thinking about them quite a bit.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: And you're cognizant of the level of danger and the risk.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: 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.

We can get into some of those.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, we'll get into that.

Josh Waitzkin: But I've been really sitting with this. Since I was a really young boy – I started playing chess when I was six years old and, by the time I was seven, I was the top ranked player in the country so I had all this pressure on me – and a big part of the way that I found – My therapy was flow.

Tim Ferriss: Can you explain that?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. When I was under huge pressure, external pressure for this little boy, my style of chess play was to create chaos. I love the game. I love the battle of chess.

Tim Ferriss: Attacking chess.

Josh Waitzkin: 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. And they find shortcuts to getting good, fast, and controlling the game all the way. They think about rating points, they think about rankings, they think about winning. They have parental pressures, they have school pressures, they have, sometimes, publicity pressures if they're doing well. So they want to control their way.

I had a different approach. I like to mix it up. I grew 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, a big part of 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 professional competitor or professional fighter. And then now I'm 39 years old. A dad – which is the most important thing I've ever done in my life, being a father. 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, you feel like you've been shattered on the most fundamental level. And I was quite comfortable mixing it up – profoundly creating chaos – and I'd be willing to take those risks. But, actually, it's isn't life and death. And then, when you're a professional fighter, martial artist, you can break arms and legs in a second if you're not in deep focus or you could break your neck. But, again, the stakes are it's you out there. And then, when you're a dad, it's a little bit different when you're surfing, or you're rock climbing, or whatever 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 today.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Metaphorical and literal states.

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

Tim Ferriss: 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.

Josh Waitzkin: Well, I've had a lot of different ways of playing this. I can describe it in terms of myself and then we can go into, when I train people, how I work with them.

Tim Ferriss: Great.

Josh Waitzkin: For me, love has been a huge part of flow. I fell in love with chess and 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 just connected to and that they can

express themselves to. They can bring out the essence of their being through some art. And then it was tremendous competitive intensity and, of course, stretching yourself to your limit, it's a very important precursor to flow. And I was always playing with people who were at my level or above and so I was always stretched.

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

Tim Ferriss: You're talking about in the meditation itself?

Josh Waitzkin: No, I'm talking about through my meditation practice.

Tim Ferriss: You became more tactile sensitive when doing push hands or some other type of practice?

Josh Waitzkin: Chess, initially, and then into push hands.

Tim Ferriss: Why is the tactile position important in chess?

Josh Waitzkin: Well, I think it's hugely important in mental disciplines. So, for example, in chess and a lot of what I do today is have this laboratory of training elite mental performers – largely in finance investors – and a huge part of the training is in their physiological and perspective sensitivity. That's their somatic awareness. That's the foundational training. Why?

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

Tim Ferriss: Totally. A Cartesian duality mix.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. This is your way of life, as well. But we intuitively can feel things way before we are consciously aware of them. The chess player always senses danger before he sees it, just like the hunter will sense the shark or the jaguar before. He'll look for it. So the chess player's process is often to be studying a position to be able to sense opportunity or danger and then to start looking for it, deconstruct what it is, and then find what it probably is and then start calculating. But that sense comes before. Or, if you're a great decision maker or if you're an investor, you can sense danger, you can sense opportunity. But you need to have stilled your waters internally to 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 a chess player, or as an investor, or as anything else.

This is one of the areas where I – We've had this ongoing dialogue in our friendship around what I call "armchair professor."

Tim Ferriss: Philosophologist.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. Philosophologist. Yes. So a philosophologist is a term of Robert Pirsig, the author of "Zen & the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance," is one of my favorite books, and thinkers, and friend of mine. The difference between the philosopher and the philosophologist is what Tim is referring to – or the writer and the literary critic, or the man and the arena and the armchair professor.

Tim Ferriss: Or Remy from "Ratatouille" and Anton Ego, who's the food guy.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: Okay, I don't know that one.

Tim Ferriss: He's the food critic.

Josh Waitzkin: Okay. Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: There it is. Okay, good.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes, there it is. And so, when we think about, for example, cognitive biases – the academics who study cognitive biases who speak about them –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: And just for people who have context on cognitive biases, for example, the sunken cost fallacy.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: "I've spent this amount; therefore, I should put good money after bad because I feel like I need to somehow try to salvage this money that I've put into a given position."

Josh Waitzkin: Right.

Tim Ferriss: I just wanted to give people who – Who –? We've had a number of meals with him. There's a gent – "Think Twice." The author's name, again, do you recall? Mauboussin?

Josh Waitzkin: Yup. Michael Mauboussin is who you're thinking about.

Tim Ferriss: Mauboussin. There we are, for people interested.

Josh Waitzkin: Yup. And so, one of the interesting things about the academic dialogue of cognitive biases is that there is the idea that the biases have to operate completely separately from the intuitive processes. 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 have integrated cognitive biases – or awareness of cognitive biases – into their intuitive processes. So there's this constant process – we discussed this a couple years ago, actually – where you're deconstructing technical awareness into something that –

So 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 that we can understand technically and replicate technically. And then we're raising our foundation up higher and higher level 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 tactile 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 –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: That corresponds.

Josh Waitzkin: That corresponds with the bias being present. And so we think, – with this relative to the language, again, of Robert Pirsig – I like the language of dynamic versus static quality. If you think of a timeline in a competitive state – For example, in a chess game, there's a certain objective truth to a chess position. If you think of chess as a timeline which is moving, if you think about Pirsig's term of being at the front of the train of reality – the freight train is pushing through – dynamic qualities right at the front of that freight train. Think about that as a timeline.

And then the other is the chess player's mind studying the position. When the chess player is present to the position, it's continuing. You're just running parallel to the truth of the position and the quality of the position. But if, let's say the something changes. You make a slight mistake. You move from having a slight advantage to slight disadvantage but you're emotionally still connected or attached to having the slight advantage. Then what's going to happen is that you are stopping – your dynamic quality is becoming static but the game's continuing. But what's going to happen then is that you're going to suddenly reject positions that you should accept, and you're going to stretch for positions – for valuations – 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 of past evaluation.

Tim Ferriss: But, if you had the present state awareness which you had trained through different tools and approaches – which you use with these elite performers, for instance – you would have the sense, the feeling, of that cognitive dissonance and not get caught up in the slip stream of that dislocation.

Josh Waitzkin: Exactly. And the way that you would sense that, in this case, is that you would feel the slip away from dynamic quality. And so you would deconstruct that feeling and then you would see what the bias is that's setting it. 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 it as a cultivating qualities way of life – cultivating presence as a way of life. In little moments and small – when we're holding our babies, when we're reading a book, when we're having a conversation with a friends, when we're meditating –

Tim Ferriss: How do you help people to identify what that feeling – to become more sensitized to it? And just as a, maybe – not a counter example – but an example of not listening to that intuition and instinct, so we were both in Costa Rica, recently, doing paddle boarding.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: Great story.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: 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 and smelled the food and immediately knew that it was something I shouldn't eat. And despite that – everybody's ordering drinks, everybody's celebrating – went into the food. And about a third of the way through, I stopped and I just pushed the plate away. And then, lo and behold, everybody gets severe, severe food poisoning except for the two people who – I guess we tried to narrow it down to whether it was the garlic dip or any number of other things. But, yeah, we were on the toilet every five minutes for the next 12 hours, minimum.

Josh Waitzkin: And the great part of it is you and I, we're in adjoining bedrooms and we're sharing the same toilet so that was a hell of a night.

Tim Ferriss: And we never saw each other. It was amazing.

Josh Waitzkin: But I heard the flushing happening. We were taking turns. That was a brutal experience. I remember the look – watching you sniffing. You had this expression of concern come over you at the dinner table and I saw that moment. Maybe I wasn't present enough to you and you didn't –

It's a great example of you didn't fully trust your gut but you were right on. It was amazing.

Tim Ferriss: Or I felt a social pressure to conform and not rock the boat. So how do you help someone, say, in the world of investing, just as an example, not only develop the sensitivity to separate that signal from the noise but also to actually listen to it? Yeah.

Josh Waitzkin: These are two different points.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Josh Waitzkin: So let's talk about developing and then let's talk about listening to it because they're both so hugely important. And I'd frame them both thematically in different ways. And I'd build training systems around them 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.

Tim Ferriss: Agreed.

Josh Waitzkin:

Yeah. Getting out of our own way – releasing obstructions. I think about the training process as the move into an unobstructed self-expression. Obstructiveness – 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 an empty space anymore. People are bombarded by inputs all the time. They're in a constantly reactive state. So one way that you could frame this out is cultivating a way of life which is fundamentally proactive in little things and big and you can build daily architectures that are fundamentally productive. 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've been trying to on-board people, specifically, in the finance space, for example, into meditation for a bit over eight years now. Initially, I would just try to get guys to meditate and they'd look at me like I was crazy. Then I what I realized – I had this breakthrough – was that I realized if I had them start doing stress and recovery interval training, then when –

So oscillating heartrate between 170s and 140s, say – so let's say someone does an 8 or 10-minute warmup and then they're on heartrate interval doing some kind of cardio – bike or whatever – moving their heartrate up and down between 170s and 140s. When they become aware of the quality of their focus on their breath on their recovery intervals, enhancing their abilities to lower their heartrate more quickly, and they start to feel their heartrate – listen to it – when that awareness would kick in, I'd layer in meditation. And the on-ramp was just much more successful. People would just – And then what I started to refine that way was biofeedback. So now what I'll do is I'll have them do the stress and recovery interval training and then I'll have them do some form of biofeedback – often with, for example, heartrate variability. We do heart math working with a specialist. And then, when they begin to have a certain consistency of their ability 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 on-ramp is even more powerful.

And so then they're in a meditation practice. I think Headspace is a wonderful tool for layering in meditation.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: I agree. And I think, for a lot of people, starting with a Headspace before bed is another gateway drug approach to then building into, or leading into, the morning meditation which a lot of people have trouble with because they wake up feeling rushed. It's another thing to layer in on top of the brushing the teeth and getting the kids ready, etc. so sometimes the evening approach – But I agree that Headspace is really useful.

Josh Waitzkin: I think you're absolutely right there and I think it's really important to have a core meditation practice which is, at least in the beginning, in the conditions in your life that are most conducive to deep focus and to not being distracted. Later in life, we want to be able to tap our meditation under complete – in chaos but we want to cultivate that, initially, in the most peaceful time possible.

So, if you have kids, waking up before the kids are up or in the evening once they're asleep. Or if you don't have kids, then life is much simpler.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Or during your commute. I've found a lot of people who will just throw on Headspace or some song that they meditate to when they know they have 20 minutes on the subway. And it's like, "Alright. That's my 20 minutes."

Josh Waitzkin: Right. Yeah. I enjoy meditating on the commute a lot, personally. You've been meditating for a long time. I'm not sure how you feel about this but I find that, if people can have the first two, three months of meditation practice in a quiet room, then, if they start doing it in their commute, they've built the foundation of it in this quiet space.

Tim Ferriss: 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 is, if you look at writers, for instance, there's 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, they'll go to someplace like that. I can't do that. For whatever reason, I thrive in noisy environments because if I have the noise, I feel like 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 five degrees to the right is making me totally bonkers.

Josh Waitzkin: Should we fix it?

Tim Ferriss: No. It's just training for me to look at that the rest of the time we're talking.

[Crosstalk]

But the same is true auditorily. So if I have a controlled noise – like music or the chug-a-chug-a of the car in the subway – I can focus on that repetitive noise.

But if I'm sitting in a space what 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 in 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, as you said, to stack the deck in the beginning.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Learn how to do this in a controlled, unstressful environment and then you can ratchet up over time to when you can use it in the most stressful of environments.

Josh Waitzkin: Right, because we don't ultimately want to be meditating in a flower garden. We want to be able to meditate and have a meditative state throughout our lives – in a hurricane, in a thunderstorm, when sharks are attacking you – any moment because that's –

Tim Ferriss: When you're paddle boarding the last day on a first trip and Josh is like, "You'll be fine," and then three leashes snap and all hell breaks loose – .

Josh Waitzkin: That's a long story.

Tim Ferriss: And a killer set comes in.

Josh Waitzkin: So that's just a little context here. Timbo and I have been on this great adventure of stand up paddle surfing – taking it on together – and we've got a great friend down in Costa Rica, Eric Antonson,

who actually has the other podcast – other than you – who I listen to, Paddlewoo.

Tim Ferriss: Paddlewoo, yeah.

Josh Waitzkin: Paddlewoo. Eric's awesome. He's a great dude. He runs the Blue Zone SUP. He's a brilliant teacher – really fascinating mind deconstructing stand up paddle surfing on increasingly small boards. And we've been going out there. And we've had some hilarious close calls. Our last trip, a couple weeks ago, we almost destroyed each other.

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

Josh Waitzkin: But the point that you brought up, I think is right on about meditation – that, 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 my buddy, Graham – who's a dear friend of ours who comes on our surf adventures with us – he's a brilliant thought partner.

Tim Ferriss: Embrace the funk. Could you explain that?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. We have to embrace our funk. We have to figure out – You think about the entanglement of genius and madness – our brilliance and eccentricity. Understanding that entanglement is always a precursor to working with anybody who's trying to be world-class at something because the entanglement is fundamental to their being. And they have to, ultimately, embrace their funk, embrace their eccentricity, embrace what makes them different, and then build on it. And 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 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.

That's how I relate to the path to excellence – in chess, in martial arts, in different arts, and very actively in the investing space, in my work in education with children through my non-profit – it's again the movement to unobstruct 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 – to sit in an 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 percent of the students by definition. It's very rare that you have someone who can take the time to – 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. For me, I only work with 8 teams and I don't take on new clients – very seldom do I take on new clients – and I won't work with more people.

Tim Ferriss: 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 intro me to Josh. I want him on my show," and I'm like, "He's not going to do it."

Josh Waitzkin: Tim, you're the only person. Once a year or two, you're the one guy who brings me out of my hermetic cave. I live a bit of a strange life because I'm not on – Not strange – it doesn't feel strange to me, it feels completely natural – but 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. [Inaudible]. I cultivate empty space as a way of life for the creative process. So, Timbo, you're the one guy that brings me out of the cave. We have a lot of fun together.

Tim Ferriss: So you were talking about these top performers and getting to know them on a very deep, subtle level so 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: Yeah, let's dig into this one. And then let's remember to look back, after this, to finish this discussion of – First of all, you were talking about how to cultivate the semantic awareness –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: And then how to listen to it.

Josh Waitzkin: And then how to listen to it. So let's go back there to training to listen to it. Okay, parenting Jack. Well, Jack's the love of my life. 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 very hard not to go into it with a lot of

preconceived ideas and to be attuned to him – to listen to him. From when he was just days, weeks old, he was teaching me. You talk about teaching presence – our eyes would be connected and if I would think about something else, his eyes would pull me back. And if there were any distractions other than him, he would pull me back. And, as he got a little bit older, he would just take my 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 own life. And, of course, I have been thinking about learning and education for a lot of years and so I had some thoughts. And so, for example, I think that 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 be able to – Right. Timbo's pointing at my grandmother's painting. That was my grandma's painting. It's a beauty, right?

Tim Ferriss: It's great.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. Stella Waitzkin. That's her self-portrait. Okay, we're going to leave it messed up. We're working on control. So, from a young age, for me when I started playing chess, I would create chaos on the board like I described. Then I would play in chess shops with people blowing smoke and playing music and I'd play chess with loud Gyuto monk chants bursting in my head from speakers.

When I'd play cards, I would never – Playing gin rummy, I'd always keep the melds out of order so –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Say that again?

Josh Waitzkin: When I would play cards –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Oh, cards.

Josh Waitzkin: A card game like gin rummy. I would never organize my hand. I'd always keep it –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Did you say meld?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, like if you have three 7s or –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Oh, okay. Alright.

Josh Waitzkin: Or like Jack, Queen, Jack, Queen, Queen.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, got it.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: I would keep everything out of order so I'd have to reorganize it in my mind. I'd keep my room messy so I –

Tim Ferriss: Oh, you wouldn't gather your – I see. You wouldn't move your cards around to organized –

Josh Waitzkin: Right.

Tim Ferriss: Got you.

Josh Waitzkin: I was creating chaos to try and train at being able to be at peace in chaos and organize things in – That was part of my way of life and I found it to be a huge advantage that I had, competitively. And so, one of the biggest mistakes that I observed in the first year of Jack's life – or Year 2 of Jack's life – that I observed as parents is that they have this language around weather being good or bad.

Tim Ferriss: And whenever it was raining, they'd be like, "It's 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." And so that means that, somehow, we're 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 when he was sick – but I don't think we've missed a single storm, rain or snow, 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. And I wanted him to have this internal locus of control – to not be reliant on external conditions being just so. And now he's four – he's getting older – so we've been playing with these things.

We began meditating together when he was a little over a year, just doing breath work. And, essentially, we started doing meditation work when he was in that most pure states.

When he'd be taking a warm bath and 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 that was – the initial experience – to be 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 was watching me do the Wim Hof training and I'd be putting my hands in ice buckets and doing this interesting breath work through cold water. And he would initially watch and he'd 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 snow storm and Jack – about ten minutes into it – we just got on this long search for the right carrot to put out to make the snowman with –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Oh, for the nose.

Josh Waitzkin: For the nose. We found it. And then Jack got in this huge drift and 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 okay. I'll just do the Wim Hof and make them warm." And I looked at him – Then, for an hour and a half, we played after that, just feet covered with snow and he was completely fine – never mentioned it again.

And then he got increasingly 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 we'd play what we called the "It's So Good Game." And so we'd reframe this thing – People tend to bounce off of discomfort, whether it's mental or physical. And so if they run into internal resistance – whether it's in meditation training, or someone exposing a weakness, or if they're training and somebody might be better than them, whatever it is – they bounce away from things that might expose them.

Tim Ferriss: They're repelled from it.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. But 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 then, with Jack, I'm not using that but, as a little child's embodiment of it, we started to play with turning on the cold water and he would say, "It's so good, Dada."

And we'd be in the hot bath and 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 would say, "I'm meditating through it. It's so good." And we were reframing cold – cold is a metaphor – from something that you bounce away from to something that you can learn to sit with, to be neutral in, to find pleasure in.

Tim Ferriss: Just like the weather.

Josh Waitzkin: Just like the weather. We had this experience the other day where he said to me, "Dada, will you tickle me slowly?" and 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. I'm going to meditate." Then the next day, he said, "Dada, will you tickle me slowly?" and I did it and he said, "Will you tickle me a little bit faster." And I didn't suggest this to him – he suggested it to me. And then we play this game where we say 1 to 10 and I would tickle him slowly and he'd start doing his meditation. And then we'd move it from 1, 2, and we'd go up to – he'd be doing his meditation – and then, finally, I'd be full-tilt tickling him.

He'd normally be in hysterics and he was just sitting there meditating and not laughing. And he found this so interesting and he's now guiding the process in this beautiful way. And now we're turning it to talking about –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Question, just to interject.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah?

Tim Ferriss: 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,"?

Josh Waitzkin: 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. I watch my mom with Jack and I think this is maybe the greatest gift that my mom gave me is having a sense of agency in the world – the

idea that 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 five and six, 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. And that's a big part of how my wife and I believe in raising Jack.

So he plays a really active role in everything that we do and so it was a natural thing and 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 then he, naturally – I've been blown away by how he's been transferring this stuff over. Lateral thinking or thematic thinking – the ability to take a lesson from one thing and transfer it over to another – I think is one of the most important disciplines that any of us can cultivate or ways of being. And that's something that Jack and I – From a really young age, we began to cultivate this from when he was really small around this principal of "go around." The first time it happened is that he was really tiny and he was trying to get in – we were staying in a little cottage in Martha's Vineyard, a tiny little college 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 he looked at me and then 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 a language for us in terms of solving puzzles and in terms of any time you run into an obstacle, go around. And then, working with the metaphor of "go around" opened up this way that we would just have dialogue around connecting things – taking away of a principle from one thing and applying it to something else – and we've had a lot of fun with that. And so it's fascinating to see this game little dude have this thematic dialogue, principle-driven dialogue, where we're cultivating semantic awareness, cultivating the ability to feel these little ripples inside him. And 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.

Tim Ferriss: There's a book you've mentioned to me a number of times – or at least a researcher – and I'm probably going to massacre this name, as well. Is it Carol Dweck – am I getting that right – mindset?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. Carol Dweck mindset. Yeah. It's fixed and entity theories of intelligence versus incremental or growth mindset.

Yeah, Carol Dweck's one of the most important foundational developmental psychologists around this distinction of a fixed perspective on how good somebody is. Let's frame it like this – most children, unfortunately, are educated to believe that they have a certain ingrained level of ability in things.

Tim Ferriss: "You are smart. You are dumb. You are average."

Josh Waitzkin: Right. And they're told – and the sad thing is that, even when they're praised, they're 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." But if you're very smart at one thing, then that means that, if you fail, then you must be dumb at it. And so it becomes very static and the kids are often quite brittle when 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.

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 and it's work – it's practice – and it's an open-mindedness to life experiences that makes us succeed.

Tim Ferriss: How would the praise differ?

Josh Waitzkin: You would praise a kid for the process versus 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, "Well, how can we practice at this to get better?" and so we're focusing on the process and not the outcome. That's the fundamental principle. And it's so easy to say it but it's very hard for people to live it to parent, especially if they don't embody it themselves. What you see often with kids and parents is that the parents are fundamentally fixed – they have an entity of their 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. One of the most important things I think that we do with my foundation – and I work with schools with 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 it themselves first. And then, through that embodied intelligence, working with the kids on how they can embody it. They have to walk the talk.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, so let's go back to what we said we should go back to at some point which is semantics and sensitivity – those dimples of light in the darkness that most people overlook. How do you train that?

Josh Waitzkin: Well, thematically, the first thing I would say is, that when you think about cultivating an internal locus of control – or internal orientation versus an external one.

So as an artist or as a performer, 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 million investment vehicle and they have partners – they have people who invest in that. And they have to write investment letters. They have all the partners – say they have 30, 40, or 50 partners who are institutions – maybe educational endowments, charities, whatever – who have put their money into this investment vehicle. And maybe that person has his own money, as well – or her own money – 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 posts, or how their tweet is being responded to. It's tweet? That's what it is, right?

Tim Ferriss: That's right.

Josh Waitzkin: See? 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 that I stay away from these things is because 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. And if the book comes out and you're tracking them, even if you know it's ridiculous and you shouldn't be doing it – Someone like you, you're such a world-class... and you have 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 – most authors, it's an

addiction. So that's a completely different point, in my opinion. You're actually gathering data and using it. Most people are just constantly feeling –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Tapping the vein.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. Tapping the vein. So, with investors that this often relates to is P & L checking – profit and loss checking.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I'm sure.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. So, most investors check P & L hundreds of times a day. In fact, it's constantly because it's on their screen all the time.

Imagine having these little adrenal hits all the time – whether it's dopamine or cortisol, whether they're making money or losing money, they're constantly bouncing off of these things. That's the ultimate external orientation. So if you think about internal plus proactive versus external plus reactive. This is how I would tend to frame this out. We want to build a proactive way of life that's 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 pressed by a sense of how we're going to be perceived – social pressures. And 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 at least deconstruct that and then investigate it and see if it's the right way to go. But they're aware that that intuition might not be perceived as impressive by others.

The problem is that the others usually aren't world-class artists. They're the armchair professors. They're the philosophologists. And so you have the man in the arena who's compromised by a sense of self-consciousness of how the critics are going to perceive him or her which is ridiculous because it's like an A player thinking about the approval of a C player and that's disastrous. That's external orientation. That's thinking that we're going to get food poisoning from something – that something's off – and then dismissing it because of – First of all, there's the incredibly subtle sense – that's how strong the intuition is. No one else at that table there – and we had some pretty 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 "bang you over the head." And then there's a feeling of the social pressures and everything. It's a very interesting subtle example but the subtle pressures were louder in that case than in the really subtle intuition that you had.

And then there's having the attitude of, "I don't care about the social pressures," but that's really hard.

Tim Ferriss: Which I was able to do a third of the way through.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: But you did.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: But not before.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. I think, in my observation, you've really evolved this. 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 to live a life that is attuned to your inner ripples. I think it's actually rather unique. I think it's a core strength of yours, in my opinion.

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

Josh Waitzkin: Yup.

Tim Ferriss: And I remember reading, at one point – I want to say it was Cato who was considered by his contemporaries and his 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 deliberately wear, I think it was, a blue tunic as opposed to a purple tunic to encourage people to ridicule him because he wanted to be embarrassed about only those things worth being embarrassed about. So 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 I was just in Montana and I went into the ski shop to get some light gloves – just for walking around, not for skiing.

And I looked at the whole rack and I was like, "Oh, I like these," and they were the most ridiculous, Dr. Seuss striped nonsense gloves you've ever seen. Like, they will not match with anything - just ludicrous looking. And I asked someone at the front desk, I'm like, "What do you think of these or should I get a different one?" She's like, "Nah, I think you should get the black ones." And I thought about it. I sat there and I thought about it. I was like, "Nope, I'm getting the Dr. Seuss gloves." 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 could face some dire consequences – but I'll do drunk Q & As on Facebook. And I'll have a bunch of booze and I'll go on and I'll do a Q & A. Something will come out that will embarrass me but it's not going to be life-destroying.

And so it's that I systematically create an environment in which 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 versus non-monogamy, and I'll throw all 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.

- Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, that's really powerful. And you know the fire of competition plays that role, as well. You look at people who compete – Let's talk about martial artists. So I own a Brazilian jui jitsu school with Marcela Garcia. We discuss Marcelo a lot.
- Tim Ferriss: Definitely. Just as I mentioned creating chaos and training yourself to operate optimally in chaos compared to others and, of course, Marcelo, who is what, ten-time? Nine-time?
- Josh Waitzkin: Nine-time.
- Tim Ferriss: World champion is the master at scramble?
- Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, they call him the king of the scramble.
- Tim Ferriss: The king of the scramble.
- Josh Waitzkin: He is the greatest transitional player in the history of the sport, maybe. He's incredible. The essence of his game is to not hold to allow people to move and to, again, embrace the chaos and get their first. He just has cultivated the transition just so

systematically that he has ten frames in transitions where somebody else will just be moving from one position to the next. But that transition, itself, is something which is 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. The school tends to win pretty much all the tournaments. A lot of guys who you've trained with –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Who did the Tim Ferriss Experiment? That was hilarious.

Josh Waitzkin: Oh my god, that was awesome. We got beat.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Day 1, I'm like, "Okay, I think I broke my rib."

Josh Waitzkin: He did great, man. You did great.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, thanks.

Josh Waitzkin: I was proud of you. Yeah, guys, you should check that out. That was pretty –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: The TV show. If you want to see me get my ass handed to me and have great time training with guys like John Stava, who is an incredible athlete and teacher.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. John is fantastic.

Tim Ferriss: That's a TV show worth checking out. But not –

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: Well, if you look at the learning curve of the people in the school – the ones who put themselves in the line as a way of life just learn much faster than the ones who are protecting their egos. Most schools, what happens is someone gets good and then they have to win to protect their status as being very good or dominant. It 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, they have a reputation so they stop training because they don't want to be exposed by the young students who

are coming up. And they sit on the sidelines but their egos get increasingly large but riddled with insecurity. And this brittleness tends to then splay down to the students and the whole school becomes a joke. Versus the way Marcelo runs our school which is so magnificent – everyone's on the mat training so hard as a way of the life. Everyone's on a world-class growth curve. And it's very interesting to observe who the top competitors pick out when they're five rounds into the sparring sessions and they're completely gassed.

The ones who are on the steepest growth curve look for the hardest guy there – the one who might beat them up while others look for someone they can take a break on. And so there's that constant search for exposure. And that's a parallel to what you're describing in terms of not having an ego to protect or you said not having –

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, a reputation –

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: Not having a reputation to protect.

Tim Ferriss: A fixed identity to protect.

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

Tim Ferriss: Here's the question I have to for you – because I feel like, particularly in Jiu Jitsu, I could get better at this – do you remember when we, that one day tied the gi on and you're like, "Timbo, your lips are purple." I thought I was going to die. I thought I was going to have heat stroke and have to be carted off.

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 there?

Josh Waitzkin: You see both?

Tim Ferriss: You see both?

Josh Waitzkin: You see both.

Tim Ferriss: In the latter case, how do they cultivate that transition?

Josh Waitzkin: I think that Marcelo is a great role model –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Because I think that's a fantastic metaphor for life, right? You get this everywhere.

Josh Waitzkin: 100 percent. I think that we think about this principle of cultivating qualities as a way of life in the big things and the little things. And when you look at the way Marcelo runs that training environment, it is pretty exceptional. If people don't have –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: He puts his ass on the line all the time.

Josh Waitzkin: His ass is on the line all the time. And he's getting a little bit older. He has two kids and he's a wonderful dad.

His life is not just 100 percent 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. He wants to. He doesn't mind getting exposed. He brings it. He's living it but he's also creating an environment where people are present to quality in little things. If someone doesn't have their gi on straight, if they haven't tied their belt, if they're sitting in a way that's sloppy –

Tim Ferriss: What happens? Does he –?

Josh Waitzkin: He tells them to straighten their gi.

Tim Ferriss: I love that.

Josh Waitzkin: When people are doing the warmup, if they're 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. As you watch Marcelo doing the warmup, there's a way that he'll have his hand and just brush against the mat as he passes it. You can feel him engaging his tactile, feeling for the room. He's someone who embodies and teaches quality as a way of life. So, if you're in your fourth or fifth round and you are looking for a way out, you feel that you're fundamentally violating this principle which you've been cultivating.

Tim Ferriss: Attending at the school?

Josh Waitzkin: Right. And this is so important. A core part of how I train people is around the interplay of themes or principles and habits. The habits are what we can actually train at. The principle is what we're trying to embody. And so we'll train at two, or three, or four, or five habits which are the embodiment of a core principle but the idea is to burn the principle into the hundreds of manifestations of that principle that will become our way of life. And so, in this case, we're talking 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.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I think the little things are the big things.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Because they're a reflection – This may sound cliché but it's like how you do anything is how you do everything.

Josh Waitzkin: It's such a beautiful and critical principle and most people think they can wait around for the big moments to turn it on. But if you don't cultivate turning it on as a way of life in the little moments – and there's hundreds of times more little moments than big – then there's no chance in the big moments.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Okay, so if people listening don't take anything else from this interview, I think that's so key to who you are. It's so key to why you've been good at what you've been good at. That's it, right there. And there's a – let me mangle another name since that seems to be one of our themes for the show this episode – I think is Archilochus, perhaps. I'm going to get this wrong. But it was a quote – got to be a Roman, maybe a Greek, who knows – who said, "We do not raise the level of our hopes. We fall to the level of our training."

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: And you can't just do one every five years, waiting for the big event. You're not going to have the training necessary.

Josh Waitzkin: As a principle that I've been thinking about a lot about on parenting. You see so often people with their second child are not as present.

Now, unfortunately, in today's world, people are often not present with their first child, either. I was taking a walk, yesterday, with a dear friend of mine in Central Park and, at dusk, we were just talking about one of the ideas we've been thinking about. And we walked past this woman who had three children in a stroller and was walking her dog, and the children were all talking to her, and she was on the cell phone – and it wasn't a quick – it was a long gossipy conversation. And I was just watching this exquisite external environment, the embodiment of distraction. Three children and a dog – the children looking, 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 of the first child. They're completely tapped in – because this is all new, they're present. And then, the second child, they 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 it is 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 ten years – training until they drop and doing external training, as well, with strengthening, and conditioning, and stretching, and everything else. And then they get to a place where they're consistently winning and then they think they can train seven times a week instead of ten and 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 anybody else trained as hard or as good as you – as smart. We're not talking about training quantitatively – we're 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 or exposure. Other people, you see a lean in – an eagerness, a gameness, a hunger for what that exposure will lead to. Those are two 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.

Tim Ferriss: So much bullshit.

Josh Waitzkin: Because people might have meditated wonderfully for four or five years, or six years, or eight 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 slip from the philosopher to the philosophologist without even knowing that it happened.

They weren't even present to the question.

Tim Ferriss: Firewalking process.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, that's important.

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

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, this is something that I've been really, for the last year or half or so, been developing intensely. I think it's been a core part of my process for some 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, 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 learned from our own. So, for example, if you're a Jiu Jitsu fighter and you slightly overextend your arm and you get arm-barred, and let's say you're Juan Morales in the world championships and your arm is being separated from your body and you feel like your shoulder is disconnecting, your arm is breaking – if you don't tap, you're going to break it.

And, often, guys will fight it. They won't want to tap. So they have the combination of huge disappointment, all the adrenal reactions to being caught and being wounded and maybe torn ligaments or tendons, depending on how the injury sets in – or maybe a bone. And they will burn that lesson into themselves and they will not overextend their arm that way again. 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 nothing. That's an intellectual knowledge that has no impact on whether or not 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.

Tim Ferriss: What would be an example of that beyond Jiu Jitsu?

Josh Waitzkin: Well, for example, a really interesting live example that I'm playing with today is we're working actively with investors and we are – A brilliant investor recently used the term, "The Pavlovian Impact," or "The Pavlovian Influences" have grown up in a bull market. 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 the foot on the gas and they've experienced pain when they take the foot off the gas – for the most part. That's oversimplified. It's really interesting to sit down and think about all of the cognitive biases, all of the subtle associations that come with growing up in a bull market. Traditionally, what people will say is you have to live through certain business cycles – the school of hard knocks – we have to learn through 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're thinking about the journey from pre-consciousness to post-consciousness competitor around a certain theme. Give them the wisdom of living through many market cycles when they haven't so then they 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 that we are maybe in the first or second inning of a bear market now. Maybe we're in the tail – the eighth or ninth innings – of a bull market. Maybe we're in the ninth inning of a bull market and we're going to see some huge run of intervention and we're going to go into extra innings of a bull market. No one really knows. Maybe there's some other dynamic at play. Even the great macroeconomists don't know but they have a sense through deep study of either macroeconomics or valuation. But we are, at one point, relatively soon, we'll probably enter a bear market so it's going to be very important. And so if you haven't lived through one, one thing you can do is you can deconstruct what a bear market looks like and you can have them firewalk it.

And so what that means is suddenly all of the – And a bear market doesn't just mean going down. It actually means the subtle undulation of as often going down for three weeks, and then a really steep two-week rally, and then going down again for three week, then two-week rally. So people often – even people who think the market will go down get really hurt in bear markets because it's violent, there's a volatility to it.

Tim Ferriss: Volatility, yeah.

Josh Waitzkin: And 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 you do this so a lot of the things that we discussed around physiological awareness – semantic awareness, cultivating the 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 something very painful to us – if we visualize with tremendous potency – we can have a physiological response to that.

Tim Ferriss: True even of exercise training. People who, say, take a ten-minute meditation visualization session in lieu of – Oh, there we go. Alright. That means we have to go pick up Jack from school.

Josh Waitzkin: We have to go pick up Jack so we'll take a break.

Tim Ferriss: But they can get the benefits of the exercise, in large part, just from the visualization over ten minutes. But we have to go grab Jack.

Josh Waitzkin: To be continued.

Tim Ferriss: To be continued.

Josh Waitzkin: Awesome.

[End Audio]

[Begin Audio]

Tim Ferriss: Okay, so we're back.

Josh Waitzkin: We're back.

Tim Ferriss: We reclaimed the boy from school and ate some Japanese food – talked about life and now here we are for the continuation. Firewalking, visualization, we're going to talk about casts. Let's continue with firewalking.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes. We were just bringing up the physical dynamics that are possible with intense visualization.

I had this formative experience that I wrote about years ago where I broke my hand seven weeks before a national championship when I was training in Chinese martial arts push hands and I was in a cast for six weeks up until, I think, three days before the nationals. And the doc said I couldn't compete in everything because I'd 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.

Tim Ferriss: The weight work? Resistance training.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. I was 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 two, that was tremendous – but I was also visualizing the resistance training I was doing on one side passing over to the other. But really intense visualization, not just thinking of it but burning it into – That's kind of when I made my firewalking distinction between thinking about it intellectually, sort of trying to visualize it versus burning it in.

Tim Ferriss: With every sensory simulation?

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, 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 two days, three days later and won. The doctors, they were pretty surprised by it. A lot of Western medicine is surprised by – They're pretty close-minded about these kinds of things.

Tim Ferriss: 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 the lessons learned of those who have been through it? So, pragmatically, how do you simulate that? Do you have them interview someone who's gone through it and then try to relive those stories through visualization or what would the process potentially look like?

Josh Waitzkin: So cultivation of empathy – to be able to do what you just described very deeply – is one thing – to be able to live someone else's experience profoundly.

First of all, we have to really be clear about the distinction between intellectual knowledge and semantic knowledge. When we're having something burned in, there's an adrenal response. 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 move between them at will. And then, when we're studying, for example, the experience of somebody getting burned extremely intensely, time and again, in a bear market during the volatility – the ups and downs of a bear market – you can look at it and it can feel just like a chart or you can experience the anxiety that comes with it, the pain that comes with it, the shattering of your previous conceptual scheme.

You can almost firewalk the experience of the Pavlovian experience of growing up in a bull market and then having that shattered – you can firewall that shattering and then open your mind to the reality of the broader cyclical over the long-term. And there's a lot of, 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 your body, stilling your waters, having a lifestyle which is less reactive, less input-addicted. Being really aware of how we fill space addictively in life – whenever there's empty space, we just fill it as opposed to maintaining the emptiness. And the emptiness is where we have the 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.

Tim Ferriss: You and I talk a lot about maintaining slack –

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: – and trying to build slack into the system and how important that is.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: And I was told by someone I respect a lot, recently, is that you have to listen from the silence and that might sound very vague but I've found that, if you really meditate on it, it can apply to just about anything. If you really want to separate the signal from the noise, you need the space to do that.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. It's such an important principle.

Tim Ferriss: Alright. We're going to take a break. We have to –

Josh Waitzkin: Baby time. Jack is up from his nap.

[End Audio]

[Begin Audio]

Tim Ferriss: And we're back to your regular programming. Joshua?

Josh Waitzkin: We're talking about slack while the slack is expiring in the system here.

Tim Ferriss: Very impassioned cries from upstairs.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, our aim today was to do this in the morning while Jack was in school.

Tim Ferriss: But fortune intervened.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: And changed our plans.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes. 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 in the creative process and for the cultivation of a physiological state which is receptive enough to tune in very, very deeply to people I work with. And so I can see how I could triple the amount of people that I work with very easily with the systems that I have but my growth curve would get much –

It would change fundamentally and my internal physiological training would take a hit – I wouldn't have enough time for meditation, for reflection afterward, for development of the thematic takeaways of 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.

Tim Ferriss: I think, in part, it comes back to the limiting of input and selective ignorance 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 training styles instead of 2 training styles.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. And then I'm reacting. I'm not embodying the core principles we're working on. And so much of, I find, really high-level training is sematic transmission. You're embodying a certain state and then you're helping somebody embody that state, as well.

Tim Ferriss: Totally agree with that. And I think if you want a good example of that, just as a relatively new dog owner as an adult, if you look at dogs and children who are fundamentally unblocked in that sematic reading ability. And you can see – just as you said, as a parent 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 in what you do, in particular.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. And then when we're talking about dancing on the razor's edge, so when you're moving up the growth curve in a certain discipline, there's a lot of things that you can do to reach the first 80th, or 90th, or 95th percentile of something.

When you're talking about the last .001 percent, 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 just right on that razor's edge. I was having this great conversation with the sports psychologist, Michael Gervais a couple weeks ago and he had used this language of thrusting into big waves. 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 the most finely tuned, in the moment, just intuitive decision-making process of whether the moment is just right or whether it's a moment that will kill you. And then, if you're working with people, as a coach or as 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 – they scale and dilute the quality. And when you dilute 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 people who are in that place – 99.9 percent listening – and ideally, you can make the most potent suggestions with the lightest touch feasible.

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

Josh Waitzkin: 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, focusing on what's absolutely most essential, and zoning in on it as opposed to just throwing huge amounts of resources at things and just having a 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 percent, then you find yourself just zoning in on what's most essential. And then, if you can learn to add resources incrementally, maintaining that potency, it's incredible what 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 of 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 and they realize there are ten areas they can take on, they want to take on all of them at once. You can only really take on one or two things at once – ideally, one theme and you take on two or three manifestations of that theme to burn that theme on and then you keep on layering. In the creative process, you talk about limiting inputs – or we've been talking about limiting inputs.

Tim Ferriss: Positive constraints, yeah.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. Positive constraints. Listen, me speaking about this principle to you – you embody this principle profoundly. What are your thoughts on it?

Tim Ferriss: 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 Ali Baba 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 – I'm also borrowing this – but 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 ten new behaviors at once that are hour wise and year foolish, in the sense that they're doomed to fail from the outset in many respects. And, to your point, also, about scaling – I have friends who call it the "S" word because it's a romanticized, worshipped notion in Silicon Valley. Scale, scale, scale. Got to 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.

And, to my mind, you can look at exemplars or you can look at examples of people who have scaled who 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." And to that end, whether you are looking to build a, for instance, lifestyle business like I have – cash-flow based business that represents, in some way, your craft. Let's just say you make – this is a real example, actually – 20 customized rifles a year. That's all you do and you sell to the top .001 percent of marksmen in the United States. You never ship more than that. That's the constraint that you want. Whether you're trying to do that or build Microsoft, that lesson can apply whether it's adding one person or adding the next thousand 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, let's just say, oil paintings in rural Alaska – versus a startup in Silicon Valley with 1,000 employees and think of them as totally different when, in fact, if you look at the top performers in either environment, they'll have a lot in common with each other. And one of those commonalities is applying a lot of positive constraints even when you have an embarrassment of resources available.

Josh Waitzkin:

If you think about this in terms of the creative process, one of the most important things of training is the ability to ask the right question to know where to look. And if you look at people in most creative fields who are extremely high level versus the incrementally lower fields, it's knowing what the most critical area is for thinking.

Let's pause for two minutes and then we'll continue.

Tim Ferriss: I kind of want Jack to say high to everybody.

Josh Waitzkin: What'd you say?

Tim Ferriss: I kind of want Jack –

Josh Waitzkin: Jack's saying hi to everybody. He's saying – We're going to get Jack playing with something and then we're going to finish up.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. To be continued.

[End Audio]

[Begin Audio]

Tim Ferriss: Okay. [Speaking Spanish] Here we have Dinosaur Train playing for the little one. Dinosaur Train creators, that one's on me. And Josh has a continuation.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah, thinking about this principle of scarcity, one of the ways that I have myself trained at this in the creative process – or harness the principle of scarcity – is to have everyone who I work with live in this routine. It's forcing yourself to, end of each day, think about what the most important question in what you're working. 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 most of this like butter.

But then there's usually one, or two, or three layers of stuckness. Most people, I find, tend to live in the creative process by surfacing, deciding where they want to go, putting their head down, and just grinding their way toward it, and then surfacing later on. They don't surface enough to reflect on what's the most potent direction to go. When you think about the human versus computer playing chess ten years ago – now computers are getting really good at knowing where to look – but ten years ago, the human knew that one of these two or three directions was the right essential direction in the sense that we cultivate the ability to know where to look. The computer had to look at everything. If we're looking at everything, then we're just operating like really, really bad computers but if we cultivate the ability to ask the most potent question systematically – Alright, so how do we do this? Well, we have a routine where we end each workday thinking, "What's the

most important question in what I'm doing right now?" Pose the question to the unconscious and then wake up first thing in the morning and brainstorm on it.

Tim Ferriss: Do you have them pose it again, then?

Josh Waitzkin: No. Actually, I think it's pretty important not to do that because then we're 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.

Tim Ferriss: Hemingway would stop writing mid-sentence and provide a foothold for continuing the next day.

Josh Waitzkin: That's right. Which we could also look at it from the framing of that internal versus external framing. If you're held by a sense of guilt whenever you're not working, then you're going to feel like you have to write everything you have to write. But if you're nurturing from the inside out your creative process, you're going to be comfortable stopping with a sense of direction when you're mid-sentence or mid-paragraph.

Tim Ferriss: When I've talked 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 like each day."

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: They're never pushing to max capacity or feeling like they're pushing to max. They always write less than they feel they should write.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. That's very interesting.

And if we think about taking this and then turning it into a systematic training of the ability to be potent in the creative process, if we're working on a given project and we're reflecting on what's the most important question here, and we're journaling on it, and the brainstorm in the morning, we're doing a lot of things to open 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 with we discussed in the past. But then, if you sit back after, say, a month and you look back at your, say, three, or four, or five journals, brainstorms, Q & As,

on a given subject and you think about, "Okay, 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 and then design your training process around deconstructing that gap and training at what that gap revealed. It's a really powerful way for individuals –

Tim Ferriss: Right. What assumptions underlie that gap – the creation of that gap or that blind spot.

Josh Waitzkin: That misperception about what was most important.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Josh Waitzkin: And 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 in what we're working on right now.

Tim Ferriss: Do you journal every day?

Josh Waitzkin: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: When do you journal?

Josh Waitzkin: Well, I journal throughout. So I'll wake up in the morning, meditate, take a cold, then hot/cold undulation shower, and then meditate, and then I will journal. I've had periods where I've just moved right – especially when I was working in lucid dream work – where I would move straight from sleep into journaling but that's my rhythm today. 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.

Tim Ferriss: Do you do that in a notebook or do you digitally?

Josh Waitzkin: 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 through habits in the language of my training process. And so this is incredibly powerful for being able to give people resources, for me

reviewing the ideas without having a recency bias impede, how I communicate –

Tim Ferriss: Can you say that one more time?

Josh Waitzkin: 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 on Evernote and all of the resources – things that I've written and things that I've read – circling that theme are there.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

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

Tim Ferriss: I see. Without recency bias. Right. Meaning the primacy in recency effect so you're recalling what you read most recently, not necessarily the best resource.

Josh Waitzkin: Right. And not necessarily the foundation of my relationship to the theme.

Tim Ferriss: Understood.

[Crosstalk]

Josh Waitzkin: And you want someone to learn from the foundation up. So really powerful – the tagging – I find – I'm sure Evernote isn't the most – I'm not a big tech wizard, as you know –

Tim Ferriss: Just to put this in perspective, so we were looking for a – we, I'm using the wrong we – Josh was looking for Dinosaur Train for ten minutes then he's like, "You know what, I think I'm going to search this thing." And I was just like, "And you say you're not good at tech."

Josh Waitzkin: It was a good showing. Thanks, man.

Tim Ferriss: No, that was a big discovery. And then Jack's like, "There goes Dinosaur Train." "It's amazing how this search function works." Should we talk about thematic interconnectedness?

Josh Waitzkin: Yes. Let's talk about it. I'd love to talk about it in the context of education a little bit. Thematic interconnectedness is one of – maybe that's the essence – of my relationship to the world or beyond. You and I have, as we had our eccentric conversations all

over the world on surfboards and everywhere else, this has been a big topic for us.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Constant topic.

Josh Waitzkin: In various states. 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 level over from chess to the martial arts, first Chinese martial arts and then into Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. And when I work with people, it's really how I learn and it's how I've found it's really powerful to help people amplify their growth curves to teach them to be able to learn the many from the few or from the one – learn the macro from the micro. Break down the boundaries between different pursuits or just parts of life based on the personal, the professional, the technical and the psychological. And if we have an experience where we're on surfboards and we have some little thematic breakthrough that we can apply 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 we might be more conducive to breakthrough, sometimes.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, 100 percent. You can see things with a beginner's mind because you have no other choice.

Josh Waitzkin: Right.

Tim Ferriss: You don't have to try to simulate beginner's mind because you are a beginner. It's like the race to the bottom experience. So, for those who are wondering what the hell that means, the race to the bottom is an expression that Eric, of Paddlewoo – 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 is there, really – very quickly realized that you are, to use your expression, dancing 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 five hours straight.

And to what extent do you focus on the board size and the race to the bottom, which gives you more maneuverability in surfing, versus actually working on some of the footwork and the other technical aspects of the game on a board that you can manage.

Josh Waitzkin:

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 Eric which is the swapping of boards between – So he had these camps where, I think, 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 so deeply which we are working on. And then they had this experience where they were all together and, initially, it was 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 carved its own lines. There's the practitioner who carves his lines but then there's also the board that has a unique rocker or finds new lines in the wave. And what these guys would find is that, if they 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 be open to what this new board could do. And then they would learn from it and then they'd go back to their board and their minds would open up. That's another way of thinking about this idea of the beginner's mind – the new board forced them – helped them – to see new lines if they were open-minded enough. So, anyway, but this is an example of thematic interconnectedness. So when I came back from that – this was 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 that are so magnificent at what they do.

But, if you could get teams to mix – to share ideas with a sense of abundance – For example, if a world-class portfolio manager could swap analysts with another PM for a week, or two, or three, wouldn't it be interesting if they were truly – everyone was sharing openly, you'd be doing equivalent swapping boards, seeing new lines. It's forcing a beginner's mind but forcing a beginner's mind not only with an open-mindedness but also tapping somebody 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.

Tim Ferriss:

And converting it, potentially, into a simple question, right? Like, "Where can I swap boards?"

Josh Waitzkin: Right.

Tim Ferriss: That could be something that is used for fodder for people listening in a journaling exercise.

Josh Waitzkin: Right.

Tim Ferriss: Wake up, have your coffee – Or I was going to say have your coffee and then meditate – probably not the right order. Meditate, have your coffee, sit down, drop that question at the top and just –

Josh Waitzkin: "Where can I swap boards?" Beautiful.

Tim Ferriss: Exactly.

Josh Waitzkin: That's a magnificent journaling brainstorm question to riff on. I love it.

Tim Ferriss: So how do you apply that to education?

Josh Waitzkin: So this thematic interconnectedness, I don't think that we can do much more important work with children than help them love learning, help them learn to bring out the essence of who they are in the learning process – so 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 really siloed right now. People think about disciplines in an increasingly data-driven –

Tim Ferriss: Segregated way?

Josh Waitzkin: Segregated way – in a close-minded way and it's kind of heartbreaking. And so I have this non-profit I've been running for a lot of years and a huge amount of what we do – So all of our work is in education. We have hundreds of programs around the world, mostly in the US but international, as well.

Theartoflearningproject.org is our website. And 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 we'll do this, for example, is we'll be working with five teachers in five different subject matters – or four, or five, or six, or three, whatever the

number is – in the same age group. What are you smiling at, man? What are you thinking? You have this great look on your face.

Tim Ferriss: I'm sorry. I was just smiling because – Sorry, guys. I was just looking at the URL as theartoflearningproject.org and I was laughing because I remembered when we were filming the TV show and we were walking up the stairs to the Jiu Jitsu – to the Marcelo Garcia gym – and you kept on saying, "TAL this," "TAL that," and I thought you were saying, "Towel, T-O-W-E-L," and I'm like, "What the fuck is towel?" And you're like, "It's my goddamned book," and you got all upset. And I'm like, "Oh, The Art of Learning." I'm like, "How did you expect me to piece that together?" Anyway, that's why I was smirking.

Sorry, man.

Josh Waitzkin: Alright.

Tim Ferriss: Now I know the acronym and I know it well. I won't anger Josh any further.

Josh Waitzkin: You didn't anger me.

Tim Ferriss: I know. I'm just fucking with you.

Josh Waitzkin: So, anyway, the – I don't remember that conversation. I'm trying to place that.

Tim Ferriss: It was great. "TAL, TAL, TAL –" for five flights of stairs. I'm like, "What the fuck are you talking about?" Anyway, my bad.

Josh Waitzkin: So the way that we do this is that we have, for example, five 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're studying also the way a certain principle of learning or the creative process of performance that calls you manifests in each of these disciplines at the same time. So they're, by definition, breaking down the walls between these different pursuits.

And it's a really interesting, systematic way of doing this. So they'll be studying the same principle in math and they move to the next subject and they're experiencing it through another lens, and then through another lens, and they're experiencing it in sport.

Tim Ferriss: Are these borrowed from "The Art of Learning" book insomuch as you're talking about smaller and smaller circles. You're talking about learning the macro from the micro, etc.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes, the root of these are in core themes of learning creativity and performance psychology that I wrote about in my book and that I've developed since. Yeah, absolutely. And we've spoken about a lot of them together.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Josh Waitzkin: And so it's a combination of individualized self-expression – Well, a lot of these themes that we've been discussing today and last time.

Tim Ferriss: And so can people learn more about this at theartoflearningproject.org?

Josh Waitzkin: They can. So we invite everybody – please come check out the site. We've got some really wonderful programs around the world and it's a good time for this right now because I'd love it if any educators out there –

We're on the verge of launching about ten really high-level program is what we want to launch – all thematically driven – right now, preparing them in the next months. And so anyone who is in the educational world who'd love to touch base with us about applying for this kind of program, Katy on my team can be reached at [katy – K-A-T-Y – at jwfoundation.com](mailto:katy@jwfoundation.com). JW Foundation is the name of my non-profit that houses The Art of Learning Project. So katy@jwfoundation.com.

Tim Ferriss: Katy – K-A-T-Y – @jw – as in Joshua Waitzkin – foundation.com.

Josh Waitzkin: Yes. And she will –

[Crosstalk]

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

Josh Waitzkin: Teachers or people running schools or school systems.

Tim Ferriss: Any minimum number of students or any other parameters?

Josh Waitzkin: Well, the essence of these programs would be a school system that's open-minded around, for example, engaging – like I

described – teachers in different disciplines working at the same time in a collaborative way so that the kids can be embodying the same principle in multiple disciplines at the same time.

And that's the essence of it. So it's a bit of a coordinated program. We've had wonderful success doing this. And that'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 can see connections. This is a big part of what I'm experiencing as a dad with Jack is how red-hot he gets when he can learn something and then apply it to many other things. And this is a core part of my approach of learning and I think it's maybe my biggest strength is the ability to find hidden harmonies between disparate parts of life

Tim Ferriss: Seemingly disparate.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. Seemingly. Right.

Tim Ferriss: Well, Josh, this is always so much fun to drag you, kicking and screaming, out of your cage.

Josh Waitzkin: You did it. Or cave.

Tim Ferriss: Or cave.

Josh Waitzkin: I like cave more.

Tim Ferriss: I like cave more. I don't know why I was thinking cage. I guess that's just my inner primate coming out. But the people have asked me often about education following my TED Talk where, at the end, I close out talking about tackling different facets 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. Like you said, in an educational system where fields are increasingly siloed and viewed as separate – and you have political turf wars between departments and what not which only exacerbates the problem – I feel like this is a massively powerful step in the right direction. So, No. 1, thank you for that and, No. 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.

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 kathy – K-A-T-Y – @jwfoundation.com.

Josh Waitzkin:

Dot org.

Tim Ferriss:

Oh, sorry.

Josh Waitzkin:

My bad. You're right.

Tim Ferriss:

Theartoflearningproject.org. And I'll put this in my notes for everybody listening. These will be – and many of the other things we've mentioned – will be in the show notes at fourhourworkweek.com/podcasts. But, Josh, I would usually ask where can people find you online but they can't find you.

Josh Waitzkin:

They can't find me.

Tim Ferriss:

So I won't ask that. Is there anything that you would like people to – besides visiting the resources we just mentioned – is there anything that you'd like people to take away, consider, do, any action – anything that comes to mind that you'd like people to walk away with just as a closing comment or question?

Josh Waitzkin:

That's a big question. Yes. Absolutely.

It's funny. As I sit with this now, for so many years, my primary identity was a fighter, a competitor, and I've transitioned in recent years and I find my primary 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 space being constantly filled. 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. And 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, with our students, with the people 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 – of where AI is headed, of 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, they come from the anxiety that comes from the lack of attachment – secure attachment – the lack of the attunement of the parent, the lack of the embodiment of the parent or the teacher and these things that are spoken about. It's heartbreaking. So maybe I'm really, really old school but there's 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, after having the experience I had a few months ago – coming as close as you can to dying as you can, basically –

First of all, on a tactical level, please, if anyone's 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, you don't want to be in water. And then –

Tim Ferriss: 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.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah. And when we talk about firewalking – about learning from other people's experiences with the same physiological intensity 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, beauty that I've been living with ever since I've had that experience and I could give it to my brothers and sisters, holy smokes, what a beautiful thing. And so if there's any way that we can just live with that deep sense of beauty, ah, that's a rich place.

Tim Ferriss: To find the stillness to cultivate – not just find but create that stillness and practice, like you said, the calming of the waters.

I think it's underestimated because of its perceived simplicity. And just as not all things are simple are easy, not all things that are

simple are low in value. Sometimes, what's right in front of you within grasp that is most important to grasp onto and make use of.

Josh Waitzkin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: It doesn't have to be extremely esoteric.

Josh Waitzkin: And it's so easy to think we've got it nailed. We can meditate for 15 years and think we've got presence nailed and then we stop meditating and six months pass and we're distracted. There's a constancy to it.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Josh Waitzkin: There's a real sense of danger that we can slip.

Tim Ferriss: 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.

Insomuch as, for me – and I know this is true for many of my friends – meditation doesn't really work well as a badged process. In other words, meditating ten minutes a day for ten days is much more valuable than meditating once in ten days for 100 minutes. And, for most people, it would be less painful; too, once you get into the 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 five to seven days and then I'm just like, "I cannot believe I wasn't doing this. I can't believe I stopped for four weeks or whatever it is." It's incredibly valuable. And, Brother Josh –

Josh Waitzkin: Thanks, brother. It was a blast, man.

Tim Ferriss: Thanks, buddy.