

# Joe De Sena II - Episode 760

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## SPEAKERS

Joe De Sena, James Geering

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James Geering 01:45

Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week, it is my absolute honor to welcome back onto the show, athlete author and founder of Spartan Joe de Sena. Now, Joe recently moved the headquarters of Spartan to here in central Florida in Orlando. So I was actually able to go down to his HQ and do the second conversation face to face. So we discuss a host of topics from the immense impact that COVID had not only on the Spartan business, but the impetus of so many athletes that participated, how we motivate people to get back outside into communities and running these incredible races, again, using Spartan Races as recruitment for police fire and the military Operation Enduring warrior 50 for the fallen, forging fitter and healthier youth internationally and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredible conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a

moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of well over 750 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories. So I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said,

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I welcome back Joe de Sena enjoy.

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Joe,

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I want to start by saying Firstly, thank you for coming on again, you came on on episode 234. So that will make it about four years ago now. Wow. So you were still up in Vermont at that point, I believe. And secondly, now you're down in Central Florida in Orlando. So thank you for welcoming me to your HQ.

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Thanks for coming over. I'm I'm happy to be face to face. We must have did a zoom four years ago. Yes, it was. Yeah,

 03:59

yeah. So actually before because we've got some pretty interesting things we want to talk about when it comes to spark and then the first one are community things that I organically believe 100% But before we do when we record it must have been not too long before COVID. So one of the things one of the truths I think that got ignored was regardless of your stance on masks and vaccines and other stuff. The underlying health of the human being conversation was largely ignored. And I've talked about this a lot. What people were told to do, in my opinion was the opposite of what was needed. So they shut parks beaches, gyms, you know, the they stopped families and friends from being together. And then you get alcohol and fast food delivered to your house. So that's kind of my perception. Obviously Spartan is one of the things that was involved in community outdoors nature, fresh air tribalism. So what was your COVID experience through the Spartan lens and through your lens specifically?

 Joe De Sena 04:57

Well, my personal lens was We immediately went to the farm. And, and we lived on the farm in Vermont. So, you know, I feel guilty saying our life improved. I did not buy into it. I you know,

no matter what you think I'm sure 50% of your listeners are going to want to choke me. But But I went to every wrestling tournament that was open for the kids, we played soccer, we climbed the mountain every day, I purposely didn't wash my hands for I don't know how many years, I just my feeling was I'm going to continue to live my life because I don't know if I have another day to live, or, you know, 100 years to live. So I'm just going to stay in the game. And what an opportunity to potentially leapfrog folks. So I feel guilty about that, because we had a great, we had an absolute great time. The shame of it, for me is very much like your own perspective, which is, you know, I used to clean swimming pools. God from like, my preteens through my mid 20s. So over over 1112 years, and I had 700 swimming pools that I cleaned, I had customers all across from Brooklyn, all across Long Island. And sitting there and cleaning those pools, you have a lot of time to think. And I was very interested in the human body, I was very interested in being fit myself. And I always thought, wow, the human body is very much like a swimming pool. It has a pump and a filter, multiple filters. It's mostly water. And, and then I thought, what makes a pool dirty? Well, if I shut the pump off, right, if I don't run around and get my heart racing that's pumping the human body. If I load it with leaves, and garbage, I mean, imagine a 20,000 gallon pool, if I threw hamburgers and ketchup and coffee and sugary, you know, candies in the pool, the pool would quickly turned green, especially if the pump was off, if I didn't clean it, and so very simplistic, you know, analogy the human body but but here we were during the pandemic, and we had shut all the pumps off. For the whole country of the whole world, we shut the pumps off. And and I remember in the town that we lived in in Massachusetts, three hours from the farm Vermont a few days before we left. As things were getting shut down. The local liquor store said sales were through the roof. And I thought, Oh my God, not only did we shut the pump off, not only are we like now we're loading our bodies with garbage, and more garbage than we had the day before the country was shut down. So I was furious. Because I think it was the one opportunity in your life in my lifetime, where the government could have stepped in and actually corralled us to do the healthy thing. But instead, we did the unhealthy thing. I didn't my family didn't but But 99% of the world did. And and that's a shame. And I don't know, I don't know how we undo it. I do have some hope for America. Because what I do see in my short life so far on the planet and in the United States, is that we do tend to swing from side to side and we go too far. And so I'm hoping we swing back I'm hoping somebody wakes up are a bunch of somebodies wake up, because I can't do it alone. You can't do it alone. And say this is ridiculous. Like it's so easy let's let's start taxing the hell out of sugary drinks and sugar right if we if we really want our freedom and we should be able to eat and smoke and drink and do all those things that somehow we're hanging on to let's tax the hell out of it. So we can motivate people in the right direction. Let's give all kinds of great credits through insurance premiums for those that then go to gyms and stay healthy and and so you could you could motivate people with money and I'm just hoping that the pendulum swings in that direction here in the next decade because um I mean it's it's it's so obvious you can't have a healthy country unless you have healthy citizens and and just take take a drive to any Walmart anywhere. And let me know if we have healthy citizens. Don't even look at the data. Just take a take a ride to any Walmart anywhere.



09:38

So I have a guest on the show, Dan Bornstein. And his specialty really is our preparedness, especially in the military. So the security of the nation. And one of the biggest concerns at the moment is obesity and our military in the pool that we can pull off and obviously that extends to the first responder professional as well. I think that's the conversation that people don't understand is You know, it's my choice to eat what I want. It's my choice to do you know what I do? And I think people forget your choices are driven by your environment. You know, if you

grew up in Manhattan, or you know, somewhere super urban, and on the corner or liquor stores, or you know, and there's no parks, you're gonna be driven towards a poor lifestyle. But when you look at the security of the nation, I don't know if you if this is happening on YouTube, I don't have the news. But my Instagram now is full of people saying China's posturing here and Russia's posturing there. When you go to that Walmart just for a second, say you're a domestic terrorist, or you know, even spy thinking about invading this country. What about a deterrent element, if you've got 70% of the country is obese or overweight? How much of a deterrent is that? How much when we're call to arms like we were in World War Two, how many people would actually be able to protect this country as well. And that's so



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easy the way about our country. So easy, right? If you have a long term mindset, if you were running a country that if you were managing a country, president of a country, leading a country that was at war with us and had a really long term view on it, all you'd have to do to wipe out the country is make sure that everybody drank sugary drinks all day, every day, make sure everybody ate shit food all day, every day, make sure everybody was inactive all day, every day. And, you know, if you had a long term view, like that country doesn't have a chance. The problem with us is, it's like that boiling frog analogy. We don't notice it. I lived in Japan, I lived in Singapore, I lived in Vancouver. And so I had a different perspective. And every time I flew into any, any city anywhere in the US, the initial shock of the size of the people coming out of Japan coming out of Singapore coming out of Vancouver with my family was oh my god, everybody's a lot wider. Here so so we don't we don't if we stay on this trajectory, we don't have a chance now, maybe you'd know better than me. But maybe if wars are for afford in the future with drones and but but even then, for you to be alert for 1518 hours in front of a screen you're gonna have a better chance. If If you're healthy. So um, but maybe AI maybe I'll take care of it. Maybe everybody could stay in front of Netflix, right eat popcorn eat shit food, sleep in in the mornings not go to work because people don't go to work anymore. And AI will take care of it.



12:36

So talk to me about sparring itself, I believe that I was on. Certainly the first in Florida, if not the first in the states of the races that opened up those with a few things are always one of them that Oh, you do Oh, aw, guys. But it was one of the ones in Florida. I think that was the first event that you open since so what impact did that closure have on a very, very positive health element a Spartan Race? And how long did it take you guys to be able to start opening up again.



13:03

I mean, listen, we got shut down, never experienced this before we got shut down in 45 countries. We went from putting on 350 events to putting on zero events. We had sold \$45 million worth of tickets to races that we couldn't put on. So now we owed people that money. It was a disaster. It is an absolute miracle that we are still alive and kicking as a company. And it's a testament to our our vendors that worked with us. It's a testament to our employees that hung in there a testament to our customers who didn't Lynch us, right. And so I joke all the

time with the team. I say Silicon Valley Bank didn't make it 36 hours. We've made it 36 months right Credit Suisse First Boston, a very storied bank from Switzerland. Couldn't make it 36 hours. We've made it 36 months. So a real shit show for us and a real shame for those human beings. That that depended on us to keep them healthy. When I showed up in Jacksonville, that ratio talking about when we came back. I was walking in the festival area and a woman came over to me and just collapsed and started crying. I got it on film. She just started crying. I didn't know why she was crying. And she was just so happy to be back. Imagine being in your house. Imagine being locked in your house and not seeing people. Now again, I was I was lucky. My family was lucky. We just we stayed in the mix. We were around people every day. We were outside. We were getting sunlight. We were sweating. We were working hard but other people weren't so when they were able to come out to that event in Jacksonville. They they got quite emotional. We're almost fully back. Canada is just coming back. Some places have been slower than others. Some were faster places like Florida were faster. We've got a massive A situation behind us of scorched earth because of what, you know, us being shut down. But um, but it is amazing. It goes to show, you know, years ago 2015 folks would say, Well, is this a fad? is people want to go outside and do hard things together a fad? And, and I think we've proven now because we're back that it's clearly not.



15:27

Well, I want to pose something to you. And I did ask you this in the first conversation is not like I have an amazing memory. I just listened to her again this morning. But one thing I want to underline with what you've done, and I didn't expand on the story last time, I used to love doing Spartans, and I used to do Tough Mudder as before you guys bought them as well. What I saw from the inception with a Spartan is this alignment with a lot of, you know, nonprofits, good causes. So the gift team and OCW and some of these other ones that you align with my personal experience with Tough Mudder prior even though its origins are actually British. I had a friend of mine who I got hired with in my last Fire Department who died of an overdose, you know, one of the many mental health symptoms that we have. And a friend of mine was already registered with the Tough Mudder she hurt her knee. And so we went to them and said, Look, can we just switch names as it's already paid, just change our names. I'm going to run for Brian in memory of him. And I got told no one even switch a name, no money involved, nothing. Can you know, conversely, I run with a gift team i Run i had Monty on the show 96. He just ran again a few weeks ago, you know, Operation Enduring warrior. And what I see is you guys constantly supporting these nonprofits, and now you are in Tough Mudder as well. So now, there's race that I love is actually under your umbrella, too. So I asked you this prior, but I'd love to just get expand on it. Talk to me about that altruistic arm and the social business model, I think is really the business model of the future. You can make money. Absolutely. But when people see that you're doing good with some of that as well. I think that's what the business world needs these days.



17:00

What's funny, right, because there are a corporations, there's B Corporations, right where they didn't and then I let's call it a C Corp, or C, or D. Like, we've basically been a nonprofit since our inception, right? Because it's so hard to make money with this damn business. But um, but my view on it, because I've been around it for 23 years in some form or fashion. Not worried about helping people out. Like I think like you said, I it comes back to you, I've seen it come back to

you. At the end of the day, what drives me personally. And then the people that come work for us must be driven by the same thing, otherwise they wouldn't work here is we just want to change lives. Like, we wish we could calculate our p&l, at the end of the day on number of lives changed. You know, I wish the government if the government was wasting money on all kinds of things, you choose what you don't like, I wish they wasted some money on us and said, Hey, you're changing lives, you're doing a good thing. Let us support you. And I guess they do in a way, right. We've got a lot of deals with the army and the Marines and the Air Force. So we do get funding from from the government, which is nice. So yeah, I just I just I love I love getting those messages all day, every day that say, Hey, you change my life, I'm back with my husband, I'm back on my wife, I gave up drinking, I'm no longer doing drugs, firefighter, veteran, New York City field comes up to me and says, I was gonna kill myself. And I didn't pull the trigger, because I remember how to race in the coming week. And I was like, You got races now in every coming week till the end your life, and it's on us. So, you know, you could look at it if you're a bean counter. And maybe somebody at Tough Mudder was a bean counter before we all know him and said, Hey, you can't change your name. Because I don't know what the because of maybe insurance or this or that. You could certainly look at it with that perspective. And say, well, we're not going to make money if we do this or like, I don't know. I think I think if you do good, it comes back tenfold. So, you know, I wish every every anybody out there raising funds for a good reason I'm trying to raise funds, I'm making up stories. I'm trying to raise funds for a basketball court for kids in an underprivileged place. In some city, I'm trying to raise money for my my colleagues at a fire department, you just go down the list. And my feeling is we have, you know, lots and lots of tickets to any kind of event anyone who has given tickets to go raise funds. When I was growing up, maybe you remember, we used to sell candy bars as kids to raise money for whatever that thing was. And I don't want people buying candy bars. So what about using tickets to a Spartan are a tough mudder or deck or any one of our events to raise money for whatever you're trying to raise money for if you're trying to do good, comes back to us tenfold those lives get those lives get changed. Maybe they buy a hat and a T shirt when they're there. I'm sure they bring three friends. And by the way, you know how hard it is to get people to do one of these things, whether they pay or they don't. Like, it's so easy to not do hard every day in our life. We don't even have to get in a car and drive to go get food anymore. It gets delivered to us, right? We don't have to go to a movie, it's delivered to us. We don't have to do anything. And so to convince somebody to crawl under barbed wire, jump over fire climb a rope. Right, tough sell. Really tough sell.



20:41

Absolutely. It's funny when when I was doing the Tough Mudder the finishing event is normally the electrocution obstacle. And I grew up on a farm as well. So there was times where I was like one leg through a fence and got zapped in the ball so I'm kind of triggered by that. And the first time I ran through it was the one where they were kind of hanging down everyone around me got here it was like a sniper was out there and I think they took all the charge and I went through beautiful so the next time around a tough where they had that the obstacle if you've done one before you go around that and you did another one. Well when we got to that particular one that obstacle was wobbly for whatever reason that yeah, sorry, we can't do it. You have to go back through and I got absolutely nailed. So yeah, I will always remember the the electrocution one but



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I love it. I love you know I love this term like toughening wintering. Again, if this you know if this was the 1500s I'd say we need softening. We need more penicillin, but we don't. Right now we need we need a harder life. To change our perspective. I 630. This morning, I was helping out a Ukrainian who lost his leg in the last year and battle over there. And he really wants a prosthetic for sport, hard to get it's got to get fitted. It's not a regular prosthetic. And so I told him, We got you covered. Don't worry, we have lots of friends in that community will fly over to the US and changes your perspective. Like this morning, I had all kinds of stuff going on, like anybody listening does in their house. And here I was talking to a gentleman who lost his leg. And we're getting him a new, you know, prosthetic and it just makes my day easier and better. Because changing my perspective.



22:30

Well, speaking of that, when I was doing some research since we last spoke and want to make sure I didn't miss any any kind of interesting tangents. You actually found yourself in the Ukraine. So talk to me about that experience.



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Yeah, I had some, some team members over in Slovakia, who very early on in the war we use in our our trucks and our warehouse to bring supplies across the border, unbeknownst to me, which is fine. I got a social post about it. And I posted it here in the US. And they attacked me my own team members have tagged me and said You haven't done anything. Joe, you're sitting over there. We're over here. Why are you posting that? And I said, Okay, that's that's fair. Like, how can I help? And they said, Well, every time we cross the border, the folks on the Ukrainian side are asking for bulletproof vest. They need help they need safety vests. So I said let me see what I could do. I reached out to some wealthy friends. I said, Yeah, whatever you want my buddy on Saks Fifth Avenue. Funny enough. Another guy who started a company called Tory Burch, very high end, exclusive, you know, clothing and things that you don't need, right? Fine, funny that they would step up on awesome that they stepped up and wrote the checks and we gave away a bunch of these bulletproof vests that led to me being on CNBC, talking about it from Ukraine. So then fast forward. And some friends of friends called me they'd see me on CNBC and said, Look, we've done very well in our lives. We Hey, what's going on? We were we want to write some big checks, but but we want to know the money is gonna end up where it's supposed to end up. Could you go over to Ukraine and like meet with like, some somehow I ended up over there. And it was awesome. And I got to sit with the mayor of Aviv and Klitschko, the mayor of Kiva and Zelensky and all these folks. And then we put together through through my friends who were so kind to write the checks 200 vehicle caravan, and, and using another friend of mine, we procure wood stoves, night vision, boots, you name it, all kinds of things, generators, and we shipped them we shipped them in through Warsaw and, and I still get pictures today of the units on the front line that are getting their stoves and their sleeping bags and their thermal vision and their night vision. So awesome. Three trips over there. absolutely awesome.



25:02

So this is the problem, when I put this to all our soldiers that have been in combat, you know, you get a very polarizing view of war. you get the. you know. the one side kilomole stack

bodies, you get the other side, they're all baby killers. And then you have the people in the middle, what I've seen through, you know, things that I've posted in who's saying what, and there's always, you know, some toxic lien from where the other is, you know, there's there's an anti, you know, Ukrainian president element, and he was no angel himself. And then, you know, the Russians are painting or painted as the enemy where I would argue most Russian people have no intentions of entering Ukraine in the first place, the regular people. So the important perspective is what's happening, that country has been invaded, those people are being, you know, murdered at this point. So what were you seeing, as far as politics aside, what were the Ukrainian people actually going through?

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Well, I did not make it to the front lines. So I had come up through war. So I was about the furthest than I was about 10 hours in by vehicle. The restaurants were open, the hotels were open. People were extremely kind and awesome and loved Americans. And I just thought this is a great place like, and is this what war feels like? I mean, there was there were a couple of times when we were there when missiles were flying over. Thankfully, they didn't. They didn't kill anybody, you know, 70 missiles came over. Ukraine was able to respond to them while they were still in the air. I did. Here's a crazy one, I did have dinner at my partner's house outside of Kyiv. And he puts on our Spartan Races there prior prior to the war. And we went in a banya, which is a you know, a Russian sauna, and you get whipped with the leaves. And then we jumped in the cold lake. And he has a beautiful house, great setting, and we had dinner and we had dessert and coffee, and it just was surreal. Being in a war zone. And this was going on, when we laughed, a drone, or a Russian drone had come over got shot down and hit his house. Right where we had dinner, and blew up half the house. And thankfully there okay, but But I guess the point is, it can be I mean, that's what war is, it's very common normal. And then it's not. And World War Two World War One, probably the same thing I would imagine, life went on, it has to, then it doesn't.

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Well, speaking of that, I want to get to the preparedness of the responder, the military member and in the pool that we're able to draw from. But before we do, what broke my heart about the pandemic was, you have a group of people that come hell or high water, we're going to work out, I'd like to think I was in that group, you know, and we do the mud runs, and the cross fits and everything else. But then there's the other side who come hell or high water, they're not going to do any of that. And then you have that middle group that I think is kind of swayed. And a lot of these people have just found their feet and they're working out and they're attending a race a year. And all of a sudden the winds taken out of their sails. Did you observe any inertia? As you know, as the wheels started turning, again, of getting the numbers that you had prior to start attending? Again, it's not just an attendance, it's a reflection, I think, on the the motivation of the population. Look, at

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the end of the day, I don't think people realize that even you and I sitting here we're pretty motivated people and maybe, you know, a half a percent of people are like us around the world that are just come hell or high water to your point. But but even us, our brain, based on our



that are just come here or high water to your point. But but even us, our brain, based on our existence on this planet for 6 million plus years, is designed to avoid discomfort. Because because most of the time on the planet, discomfort was a real threat. Right? If we went out in the cold, we might freeze to death. If we went outside the cave, we might get eaten by a lion. If we went too close to that cliff, we might fall off, forgetting about all the energy required for the brain, which is which is a threat like hey, if we expend all that energy, and we don't have food available to us, that's dangerous. So don't do it. Don't expend energy, don't push hard. Hard is bad. So our brains are constantly telling us all day, every day from the moment we wake up to the moment, stay away from that hard stuff, right? It's legacy hardware and software we have we're programmed this way. Going to the gym is the complete opposite. It's considered danger. It's hard, getting outside and run. It's kind of you know, it's considered danger and hard. So, so here we are to your point. And we convinced you know, 10 million people since our inception to rewire their brain and do something hard and feel good about it when they get to a finish line. And and then the government comes out and says no, don't do that. Stay home, take it easy. Protect yourselves. And, and the brain listens for most people because it's like I don't I don't want to do that anyway, have what it was called, I don't want to be under barbed wire. And so to wake everybody up again and get people going, oh my god, it's been monumental. Remember, I'm doing this 23 years, the first 13 years from 2000 to, you know, 2013 it was a nightmare to get people going, I finally got them going. And then we told them all go back in the house. So yeah, it's, you know, I'm not complaining. I love what I do. I love the stories. But I do need some help. I do. I cannot do this alone. We cannot do this alone.



30:43

Absolutely. Well, I just saw as well, you have a new series called the edge. And you had a gentleman, John Crosby on talking about overcoming 30 year addiction with the tribalism that he found in, in the Spartan Races. So talk to me, again, you've seen we talked about in the first episode, some of the amazing kind of mental health stories that you'd heard, what I've witnessed is now there's this ripple effect from all the damage we did the last couple of years. So, you know, talk to me about the community element or tribal element, because I think that's something that people are kind of searching for something and I think Spartan and Tough Mudder are some great places to find that community.



31:22

Well, I mean, we know the science has proven that we do better. As a species, when we're in a pack, we hang out, we hang out with people, right? There's a community there. There's not much of a community in your living room. Right. And if you're not going to an office anymore, there's not much of a community there anymore. So you might get at a church. But the numbers are down at church, you know, people aren't going to church, you might get to the gym, but the numbers are down in gyms. What's nice about our events is you'll get 710 12,000 people that are in a weekend. And so you check that box for folks. And they feel really good because they're their feet are touching the earth. Their eyes are connecting with other people. They're sweating, there's sunlight, there's all these things that they don't get on a daily basis anymore. Very, very powerful. You know, a lot of folks around the world have said to me, Joe, we got to build a permanent course, here or there in South Africa, in his backyard? And my answer is, it's great. I'd love to have permanent courses, but like, they don't work. What makes our courses work, is the fact that there's 12,000 people there on a weekend. Like, just go to a local park and go look at the obstacle course and tell me how many people are using it. During

the day look at a sidewalk where people were meant years ago, they actually walked on sidewalks. They don't do that anymore. Now this they did. Yeah. So so like. So like the community aspect is, it's the whole thing. It's the whole thing. Without it, we wouldn't exist.



33:06

I started CrossFit in Oh 70607. And it was in a community. It was one of my firefighter friends in Anaheim, then. And then I moved back to Florida. And I was back to doing main site workouts. I was at a YMCA and people were looking at me like I lost my fucking mind, you know, why is he murdering himself with these random implements. But it wasn't until I joined a CrossFit gym that I found that piece that was missing. And that was it doesn't matter if you're the world's strongest man or woman, or the world's, you know, most, you know, highest level endurance athlete, or you're just a housewife or a firefighter, or whatever it is. You all suffer together. And that was the missing part. I think that's what's so sad again, when they tried to burn the church down. But Greg was, look at what you know, look at what you're a part of, you know, the moment that we're discounsel culture say, oh, one person said one thing and they would think that it was actually misunderstood in the first place. But it is that very community that we need. And and it was that very community that was shattered in that same time period as well. We had so many things going on those couple of years. So I saw firsthand, doing the exact same workouts, but you move those workouts to a sweaty room of other people. And it's an entire different conversation and different experiences.



34:22

There's no doubt about it, right? I go I go at one level alone. I go to a different level when you show up subconsciously. And then all of a sudden you put 20 people in the room and it changes everything. So I couldn't agree more. And community is a big box that we check for people.



34:40

Absolutely. Well, my community is the fire service. And we were talking before we hit record. We have a recruitment crisis at the moment and what really kills me about that is we still run the Corps and when I say we I've been out the fire service for four years so my brothers and sisters are the ones that say One o'clock in the morning, I told you can't go home today, you have to stay another 24 hours and your 56 hour week now became an 80 hour week. So, of course, I want you know, the department to actually be fully staffed for the for our ability to respond properly. But also this recruitment issue that we have is hands down contributing to the funerals, that, for example, started this podcast in the first place. So talk to me about you know, the the the idea you have joining my community with your community.



35:29

First of all, we could solve uniformed services, not just fire department, we could solve uniformed services, recruitment issues in about 11 seconds in the United States. I think when we think about recruitment for all uniformed services, not just Florida, but we're hoping the phone rings, we're hoping somebody signs up to become a Marine, right. And I think we're

doing it wrong, I think we want to bring people into an event like ours, where we know they're the right person with the right mindset, because they wouldn't be crawling under barbed wire, if they right if they weren't. So they're in the right place. They've got the right mindset, they're all at the same place on a weekend, we bring in the fire department, we bring in the EMTs, we bring in the Marines, whoever it is, and we let them mingle there, and we introduce them to what it is to be a firefighter what it is to be a Marine, what it is to be an EMT, I'd be shocked if we can't convert a bunch of folks. And by the way, we would know in advance that the ideal fire department, fire recruit Fire Department recruit, let's say, as I'm making it, what are the 22 years old or 19 years old, or I don't know what it is, right. But we could find those kids, those those boys and girls, those men and women, and we can have the firefighters run with them. And do that by the time those kids get to the finish line. They'd be getting in the truck and heading right to the fire department to sign up. That's the way you do it, in my opinion.

 37:01

So there's so many elements I think that I say could like I've seen it I'm am a firefighter and I did these but the first one is when you're whether you're preparing to be in the uniform, or whether you are in uniform, specially I was talking the who was it? Oh Chris today, I'm sorry. Chris Chad, Chad Conley, in the Green Berets, they work up for a specific mission. So they have that kind of, you know, game season and offseason. In the first responder professions we don't like for 1020 30 years, you're on this treadmill. And so what I find with with the races is if you're already in the profession, it gives you something to train for. So you can get that community, you can tell your shift your station, whatever it is, hey, in four months from now, let's do this event that's going to be in our state. And now you can start training for it. And when you do your PT, and maybe you can meet at the park,

 37:55

I'll even do one better imagine you and I saying to every fire department in the US or anywhere, hey, take a couple of 100 entries, and wrangle your community, right get to know your community. By the way, you might be able to find a few folks in there that want to join the fire department. And it's on us take those tickets and use them. I mean, the bonds that you build, doing something hard together and training for that something hard, the fire department become even a more integrated part of the community.

 38:27

Well, I think the last time we spoke was that 911 initiative that you did that a few years ago, and I know a bunch of people sent me for months after some videos of the races that they'd signed up for.

 38:37

That's awesome. Well, yeah, your whole community, if they want to do an event, it's on us Tough Mudder or Spartan, DACA, whatever they want, as long as it's hard. And I do want to say to your community. The other thing is a fun one up in Vermont, end of June 2023. So coming up

here soon, we just teamed up with Norwich University, which is the oldest military private military institution in United States, we're going to have a one and a half day class, their resiliency class. So I'd love folks to come up to the farm, go up the street to Norwich, get their butts kicked in classroom and a little bit outside the classroom. And just find out why it's so important to be resilient, and how to be resilient.



39:16

Where can they find more information on that?



39:18

It's a great question. Shoot me an email [joe@spartan.com](mailto:joe@spartan.com) and just put just put Norwich in the subject line [joe@spartan.com](mailto:joe@spartan.com) Put Norwich in the subject line and we'll get you set up for that. But it is an accredited course. How awesome would it be to be beyond you know, Military University and take a class on resiliency.



39:42

So flipping it around you have the active duty firefighter who gets his team together, which I've done, and you know, run as a team. I think another thing just to just as a side note as well. I think there's a misconception that it's a race. And what I love is yes, wave one, maybe two, there are races and there's a leaderboard. As a national, you know, ability to be a champion in that sport, but all the other heats after that are simply moving through together. And what I absolutely love is I we used to run with two guys and we were in pretty good shape and pretty good at the obstacles but it wasn't you doing the obstacle that was beautiful it was helping other people over the obstacle. So whether it's like Operation Enduring warrior with with Monty or the gift team, also helping them more true Stokes is another one that we took through that is the the humanity element. So you're a public servant, you're trying to make the world better where you literally gets a feel out whether you're a potential candidate for those professions or whether you're already in and you're refining that camaraderie, brotherhood sisterhood, the maybe even as lost in your specific department.



40:46

No, no doubt about it. I think it's so important that our families, our friends, our communities, we do hard things together. Alright, you dust off any any spider webs that have showed up that might be causing friction between people? Or because we do we do we do kill each other? I mean, think about it, right? We do attack each other. We do talk about each other. We're, we're a crazy species. And, but if we could do more hard things together, we get along a lot better.



41:18

Absolutely. Well, so flipping that around as well. If you had a team of firefighters, for example, at the races, you would then also be front and center. Because where better to look for potential candidates than as you said, at a Spartan Race. So not only you may be running with

potential candidates than as you said, at a Spartan Race. So not only you may be running with some people, you're running as a team, and people are watching you.



41:38

You're finding recruits. Yeah. And we would support that 1,000% We would help we would help those fire departments. Recruit super, super easy for us to send an email. Maybe Maybe we don't give anybody their medal at the finish line when unless they sign up. Become a firefighter.



41:55

We're gonna make sure we got the right people. Well, speaking of Chad calmly say he's got 50 for the fall and talk to me about that cooler that you've got going on.



42:03

Maniac. Any maniac, especially military maniac in the world that's doing something crazy that wants to team up with us. We say yes. So. So Chad, our mutual buddy is doing these 50 for the fall and Ron hikes. It was doing them all over the country, I said, Well, you should always end them at a Spartan Race for a Tough Mudder. So he's been he's been aligning them with some of our events. And folks will start, you know, 45 miles away from the event and they'll hike, jog, run rock rocket in and then get there and some maniacs will actually do the event as well, when they get there. So he's raising funds. It's an awesome, awesome organization.



42:48

Yeah. And he raised his funds wherever he actually does the ruck a local charity in that area, which is pretty amazing. All right, well, then I want to shift from obstacle racing specifically to leadership. One thing I've talked to quite a few people recently is when there was no better example of the last two years of whether a leader was the right person in that position, or whether they were wrong, and this is at national level, local level, etc. From an entrepreneur, yourself and a leader, you know, in your space, what has been your experience the last few years, which is straddled both sides of the political parties? And then you know, what are some things through your lens that we could do better? What what do we need to be, you know, pushing for as we come out of this?



43:33

Again, I think it would be so easy if we're talking about leadership of our country. Whether you're a Democrat, whether you're Republican, like it would be so easy to get everybody rallying around, you know, the same mission and feeling better, if we just focused on health and wellness. Right? You focus on like, this is gonna sound absolutely ridiculous. This will never happen. My dream would be your dream would be that it happened. But I'm just imagine it's two, instituting a few policies. What if we, what if lights were out for the whole country at

11pm? And I'm ready to go to bed? What? There's nothing good that happens after 11pm? Right? What if everybody had to get up early and do just 30 burpees? Right? What if what if we shot? I was actually looking this up the other day? What if we shot hot water off across the entire country? Right, and everybody took cold showers, we know they'd be healthier. The carbon footprint change would be unbelievable. I started to look at some of the numbers. Right? You could talk about, you know, not eating meat anymore. You could talk about switching over to electric cars, but a huge impact would be just don't take hot showers. What if we tax the hell out of sugary drinks? And now I know you know, half the country would jump up and down and freedom and I would I would say like, I get it but like we're not handling our freedom very well. Like we fight with each other. We overeat We're sick. We're putting enormous stress on the health care system.

 45:06

Do we even have freedom though? Do we really get to have autonomy? And what goes in our air, our water our food?

 45:12

Well, you'd be a lot. Listen, if you're healthy and discipline, you're a lot freer. Right? So you are shackled to maybe God forbid you're at your hospital bed, or your house, right? Or those pills you have to take because you're not taking care of yourself. So like, Yeah, I mean, you if you really want freedom put down the Slurpee.

 45:34

Yep. Right. Yeah. I mean, like I said, the last couple of years, there was such a, an amazing potential to bolster local farms, like healthy organic foods, you know, put real food back in schools put bolster P programs, again, I mean, all these things. But we argue about freedom. But it seems like those divisive arguments do the very polar opposite of freedom, you know, freedom would be your young child finds their maximum potential in their body and their mind, and we're not set up our environment is set up for people to fail, it's really is set up if you're an inner city kid, I would argue that you're more likely to be pushed towards obesity and inactivity than you are you and I were very lucky.

 46:21

It's not even just in our city. I mean, I in Vermont, on our farm for 14 years, I remember some of the young kids, we'd never see them, they never come outside. I was confused, because I had never, I hadn't had kids before. And the last time I was a kid, we were always outside. So I was just completely. My kids were outside. Most kids weren't.

 46:40

Yeah, my son will be running track in about two hours from now. So I'm gonna go and watch him race. But again, that's the environment he was fortunate enough to grow up watching his

nirm race. But again, that's the environment he was fortunate enough to grow up watching his dad working out being outside walking the dog and just doing normal things I consider but, you know, I think the problem is, is if we looked down on those at some people that never knew that, that grew up and thinking it was normal to watch TV all day, and you know, not be outside. Those are the ones this is the hardest person to kind of, again, break that inertia, because that's all they've known that is their truth in some of these households. So speaking of schools, what about that, if you could be king for a day? How would you change so easy, go for it



47:21

so easy. I, I would go to Google, Facebook, all the law, I would say the top 10 highest market capitalized, you know, publicly traded companies in the US, US companies, obviously, I would say you get, you get to be there. And in this moment in time, it happens to be the apples, the Facebook's the Googles, you get to be there. But before that privilege, you must fund all PE in all schools across the country. So that very device you're selling, and that attention that you're stealing with that device, you now have to use those funds, a portion of those funds to take care of all PE in all schools. So that our school systems stop saying they don't have the funding for physical education. That's what I would do to second soft.



48:12

Now what about the nutrition side because as a parent, the nutrition



48:15

side, I would I would have to put if it were me if I were king for a day, I my friend ran New York City schools Food Program \$1.2 billion annual budget, he had the greatest intentions as you and I would have to put in, you know, whole wheat bread or get rid of sugary drinks or whatever. He couldn't get it done. I said, why couldn't you get it done, Eric? He said because the potato lobbies and the sugary drink lot said Coke Cola writes a \$50 million check to my school system. Now I can't get rid of what I want to get rid of. And they want the \$50 million. So you just put some policies in place in government that say you can't do that. You cannot mess with our kids. By the way. Coca Cola Warren Buffett, you make a fortune. You sell your ice cream, you sell your junk food for that privilege. You now got to put healthy food in school.



49:08

I agree. 100%. I mean, it's nauseating. I see the soda machines. It's funny when my my bonus boy my stepson was in the high school that my son is in now. He was Oh yeah, they got rid of all soda in the school. And you go in there. It's all the sugary energy drinks instead. Like that's the same exact thing. They just put a new label on it still got caffeine still got sugar. It's the same shit. So yeah. Well, then with the Spartan universe, what are some of the new things new ideas that people will be looking for that are coming up? You mentioned the Norwich project, for example.

 49:40

Yeah, we look anything hard. We want to be a house of brands. We don't know what's going to tickle your fancy. It could be a mountain bike race. We all know the toughest, most brutal oldest mountain bike race in the world called La Ruta. Anybody wants to La Ruta and you're in there and they want to go to hell and back in Costa Rica, let me know it's in November. We've got em to our toughest paddleboard race in the world and Hawaii anybody wants to do that. Let us know. We've got the Norwich project, which is ended June on the farm. We've got DACA which is appealing to those that love the gym. Right we want it we want to appeal to the gym set. So come out and get your DECA mark which is 10 stations, you're tested for time. You will definitely want to vomit at the finish it it's short, but it is painful. We've got Spartan trail. There's a lot of people don't want to do obstacles but but they love climbing, hiking running outside. So we've got Spartan trail all over the world. We've got Spartan we've got Tough Mudder and I feel like I've missed something in there. But um, but anyway, if it's hard, we're doing it.

 50:52

Now I touched on Monty just before I got some closing questions.

 50:56

Highlander. Highlander is hiking, brutal 60 to 100 mile hike as a community. They're stopping along the way they're setting up their tents. It's called Highlander adventure. Incredible.

 51:08

Beautiful. I haven't heard of that one. All right, Dan. Thank you. So Monty is currently 96 and still doing Spartan Races that she's ended up sharing a few videos recently. One was 102. Lady 102 year old woman who was the I think it was like a 400 meter champion. There was a Nike eight year old man in France who just ran a marathon. So we talked about the youth and the uniform professionals talk to me about longevity, what are some of the stories that you've heard of the the other side of this timeline?

 51:36

Well, I mean, all the science shows that we have to remain active, we have to remain strong. If we want to be on the planet for a while. You don't want to be the person with the largest biceps in a cemetery. Like I think we somewhere along the way we lost our way, which is let's let's overindulge on protein, let's build massive bodies that are taxing all our organs. And that's not healthy. So, so this optimal zone is it's proving out that the science is showing is like a fitter, you know, more more gray hat not Greyhound give me give me a dog that would that would match this. German Shepherd. Yeah, exactly. And it Darren Shepherd, there you go. As opposed to, you know, a giant pit bull, or, or, or a greyhound. And so So look, we all need to be inspired to stay on that fitness journey. And I got a lot of friends that are 7580 years old, and they're home alone. And so a guy like Monty gets to come out again and see that community



and have a reason we need a reason. When you and I are 90 said we need a reason. And and and this provides the reason this is basically it's a basically a healthy Disney Experience, right? I want to have a theme park here in in Lake Nona. I'm going to put in a theme park over the next three, four years. We're gonna work on that. I'm envisioning a barracks. People could stay overnight, get that full experience.



53:07

Beautiful. You came to the right city? Yeah.



53:09

Yeah, it would be the antithesis of Disney universal.



53:14

Now with that mindset as well, my my grandmother just passed away and she was basically 105 105, she was four weeks away. And then my granddad died of cancer at 99. However, he would have lived a lot longer otherwise. So when you look at like, I'm 49. Now our kind of age. There's a lot of people that see that as like, well, you know, I'm over the hill. Now, this way, I've got all these meds and I saw that as a paramedic. How do we shift that mindset of the perceived not only length of of a lifeline, but also the quality of life? Because we seem to have lost that kind of wisdom, elder element in modern society.



53:51

It's not lifespan, it's healthspan. Right? How long are you healthy? Are you healthy to your 75 and then drop dead, that's, that's great. But if but if you're healthy, till you're 50, and then you're spending 25 years in and out of hospitals, that's not much of a life. So like, it's easy, it's easy, drink more water, eat more salad, and exercise more. It's so fucking easy. I don't, you don't want to do it. Because you've got that legacy hardware just like I do that legacy hardware and software. And your brain is telling you to drink coffee in the morning instead of work out and read the news and scroll through social media instead of working out. I don't want to tell you



54:33

from as you can't get rich from that, that's the thing. So there's a lot of a lot of people that are as thin. That's it. That's one one of the solutions I've talked about a lot is just do what your great grandparents did, and you probably 90% of the way there. All right. Well, I'd love to throw some closing questions at you before I let you go. The first one I'd love to ask I did ask you about four years ago now it'd be interesting to see if it was the same answers. The first one are there books that you love to recommend. It can be related to our discussion today or can be pletely unrelated,



55:01

you gotta read Shackleton's book, right? I don't know if I mentioned that four years ago, or not the endurance you got to read a draft. I think the author if I remember correctly, Steven Callahan, and I like Shogun



55:15

Yep, same ones so yeah hasn't changed because Shogun is one of the few fictions I've read. And I'm actually writing a fiction now so I literally that's about one of the ones I'm pulling from but that is an amazing amazing book amazing book. All right, what about films and or documentaries?



55:29

I mean, I love rocky oh, god I'm gonna seem so boring here. I love I love rocky what's my favorite documentary? I miss so many great documentaries. Forks Over Knives is a great one. What other great move Oh Batman Begins



55:59

so Forks Over Knives obviously is pushing the plant base. No no narrative is wrong. I say at the Palm base movement. I I agree with a lot of what they're talking about. I went plant based for about six months. Really enjoyed it, but I ended up kind of shifting back to some pain. Listen, I



56:15

ate two hamburgers last night. Like I I am mostly veggies. I mostly veggies I if



56:23

that's a diet. Yeah. omnivore diet, really. And I



56:26

eat a ton I love salad and the salad I eat which I think is game changing for anybody. If you can if you could deal with these ingredients and I eat it every single night is is cucumbers, red onion, black olives, apple cider vinegar, olive oil. I eat it every night change change your life. Beautiful. Yeah. Yeah, not hydrating is loaded with minerals. It Yeah. So



56:52

yeah, I think that's the problem is if you look at all these different diet you know I want to say fads but diet philosophies. The common denominator is usually just removing the process shit if you going carnivore if you're gonna try you can you know, that's the that's the common denominator. Yeah, they'll murder each other over they're not agreeing with each other. But the, to me the



57:12

the Venn diagram, they get rid of process shit.



57:14

Exactly. All right. Next question. Is there a person that you recommend to come on this podcast as a guest to speak to the first responders, military and associated professionals of the world?



57:24

You know, one of my favorite people. I mean, obviously, Kelly Starrett, you know and Julia Kelly and Juliet are great. I love Gabby Reece and Laird Gabby. Gabby should be President of the United States She's She's so awesome. I mean, I've had so I think 700 guests so I my brain is fried for who but everybody's great that's that believes in what you and I believe in and getting people healthy.



57:51

Beautiful. When we did the first conversation. I never followed up with you. There was a gentleman James bins.



57:56

Oh, Jimmy. Yeah, you should definitely have Jimmy



57:59

let's get let's make that happen for Gabby. Actually, I've got some mutual friends. So she's gonna want to get on as well. Yeah, work on that. Brilliant. All right. Well, then the last question before we make sure everyone knows where to find all the Spartan things we've discussed. What do you do to decompress?



58:13

Last night, I watched 25 minutes of whatever the prequel is for Yellowstone. So I tend to watch something for 2025 minutes, put the computer down, pass out. Beautiful. It's it.

 58:28

There was a show I just watched on Netflix and it was called beef. Ali Wong. One of the best pieces of television I've seen in a really long time really do amazing. Yeah, yeah, it starts with this road rage incident. And it just takes you on this bizarre ride over like 10 episodes.

 58:43

Check out there's a movie I caught on a plane. I love to watch movies on planes. The triangle of sadness? Really, I've never heard of that one. Yeah, it somehow admit Woody Harrelson is in it. You'll appreciate it this and British accents in there. And it really shows you the human condition from 50,000 feet and how silly we are.

 59:08

Brilliant. So does this actually so that you probably enjoy this too? All right, well, then the very last thing if you want to find the world of Spartan or yourself online, where the best places,

 59:17

you can go on Instagram and Tiktok and all those places, but just shoot me an email [joe@spartan.com](mailto:joe@spartan.com) put, like I said before Norwich or maybe throw firefighter in there. I'll know I'll know where it's coming from happy to get you an entry to something hard and change your life.

 59:33

Beautiful with Joe. I want to say thank you. We did it over zoom second time face to face so I appreciate your time. You're the man

 59:39

Thanks for having me.