

Expert Tips & Tactics

Doing and being

There is a space between doing and being and it is called learning. To anyone who has coached or taught any student to a high level of performance in any field of endeavor, the previous sentence is self-evident.

I can tell you from years of experience that there is a difference between doing martial arts and being a martial artist. But do we all accept that there is difference between running a business and being an entrepreneur? I've got black belts a-plenty, and even after forty years of training I still only have occasional days when I am truly a martial artist. Most of the time I'm still practicing. I have much less experience running a business and it would seem that I am a slow learner. I would not dare to call myself an entrepreneur, except in my most arrogant of moments. I'd like to *think* of myself as an entrepreneur, but I'd also like to think of myself as a concert pianist as well! The contrast of reality and imagination is graphic and brutal: I can't even play the piano.

Let me see if I can explain. In the world of educational psychology, we talk about four stages of learning: Uninformed Incompetence, Informed Incompetence, Conscious Competence and Unconscious Competence.

Six-year-old Ninjas perform at the level of Uninformed Incompetence. They live in a world of possibility and are not aware of the real world of Ninja-dom. They don't even really care that such a world exists. All they care about is the vibrant, possibility-filled world of their imaginations.

When I was given my first Black Belt I was hit by a blinding realization that I didn't know anything. It was like that the first time I stood in a classroom as a newly minted Ph.D. and it was like that when I signed the lease on my first business location. In all three cases I had become an Informed Incompetent. I knew I didn't know anything.

As time went by, learning took place, experience was my teacher and I became a Conscious Competent. I studied. I looked to my mentors for guidance. I began to figure out how to practice martial arts, how to lecture and be an academic, and how to run my business. In each case, as the years have gone by, systems have emerged and have been refined. Even so, in all three cases I am still acutely aware of the limits to my knowledge. The problem with being aware of the limits of your knowledge, however, is that...you don't know, what you don't know you don't know! Really. Think about it for a minute...You don't know...what you don't know you don't know...how could you?

The void filled by 'what you don't know' is the space for more learning until we cross the gap from doing into being. I tend to think of moments of 'being' like touches of enlightenment. When I think about my business I see myself running my systems like a hamster on a wheel; I do it because I know what works and if I jump off the wheel the systems will fail. I have not yet moved to the level of unconscious competence where *being* an entrepreneur holds the wealth of knowledge and experience that will allow me to flow with the currents of my business. The level of unconscious competence is the level where what we do happens without conscious thought. Unconscious Competents are the true masters of their skill. I have a long way to go to reach that point in running my business. I am still somewhere on the line between Informed Incompetent and Conscious Competent (depending upon the day in which you find me).

The metaphor of practicing martial arts and being a martial artist is so powerfully resonant with running a business and being an entrepreneur. If we took the lessons we learned from the former and applied them to the latter we'd shake the martial arts industry to its foundation.

I'm curious about why we don't do that. Do we not see the connection? Are we too complacent? Are we too confident in our abilities to need to ask for help? Do we get in our own way?

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