

Expert Tips & Tactics

Open Your Eyes

As I write the outline of this column, I am sitting in the international departure lounge at Atlanta airport, preparing to fly to England. As is pretty typical for me during my spare time, I am reading and thinking, watching and studying. My boy is playing by the window, excited to be watching the jets taking-off and landing. He finds another young playmate, who we shall call Ryan. Ryan, it turns out, has just turned five and is about to teach an unwitting onlooker some valuable lessons.

In a previous article about stagnation, I closed with the following advice:

“During times of stagnation look for new lessons in old places. See with eyes that have never looked and expect to be surprised by the results.”

As of you may know by now if you have visited this website more than once, I have been doing martial arts for forty years and I don't expect to get surprised by what I see very often. On the other hand, I am always on the lookout for novel ways to teach old skills...after all, master teachers are magicians who disguise the basics and the obvious to make them appear new and different...all the while honing simple skills that build rock-solid foundations for quality martial artists...or students and performers of any subject for that matter.

So let's get back to my young son and his erstwhile new friend, Ryan:

Lesson One: With an open heart you can discover friendship any time that you choose to do so. You can make a bond of connection with a stranger and give them a gift without even trying.

Lesson Two: What we do without thinking or planning can have effects that we could neither imagine nor foresee.

Lesson Three: Our actions create ripples, all the time, everywhere, whether we know it or not.

Lesson Four: Ryan has a really cool blocking drill I have never seen before.

Say what?

Well, it turns out that Ryan started taking “karate” this past Fall and is eager to demonstrate what he knows to my son. Most of it, (as you might expect from an excited young boy getting ready to fly to a new country for the holidays) is merely throwing his arms and legs around and yelling, but then all of a sudden he drops into this amazingly deep, well-practiced side stance and calls out a blocking drill. The stance betrays the fact that his instructor is from a shotokan-type of background. In this little young man, you can see his teacher. He goes through his blocking routine, calling out the moves as he does so. The essentials are all there: Balance, position, coordination, focus. The precision will come with time. The power and the understanding will come with time.

Then, as quickly as it began, the moment is gone.

I look down at my book and smile at a novel twist on an old saw. I decide to file it away for use in my kid’s class. Ryan has just shown me a very useful skill to teach my own junior martial artists. All of us, who teach striking arts, have blocking drills of one kind or another. Ryan has just added a new drill to my teaching repertoire.

A few lines further on in my book, synchronicity smacks me between the eyes as I read:

“Meaning is essential. If this moment truly matters to you, you will experience it fully.”

I look at the boys again, Ryan and my son have returned to playing with their trucks, occasionally watching the planes, the novelty of which seems to have worn off a little...another lesson!

And the moment is truly past. Thanks boys. Thank you for the lessons you offered me today.

Thanks also to an unknown karate teacher whom I have never met, but who cast a stone into Ryan’s young life. The splash of that particular pebble of learning will echo in my junior martial arts class. He or she will never know. Ryan will never know. My students will never know.

But it’s not about martial arts is it? It’s about humility and new ways of seeing your business.

And herein lies my message to you this month: Keep your eyes, your mind and your hearts open, all the time, everywhere. Fully experience the moment and perhaps someone will teach you something new...even if they are only five years old!

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