

Pathways

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CONTENTS

Double-edged swords.....	1
Resilience under stress	2
Board of Directors.....	3
Decisions and non-decisions.....	4

"A single question can be more influential than a thousand statements."

Bo Bennett

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Double-edged swords

Something I have been thinking about over the last few months is the notion of "multiple possibilities."

In the martial arts there is a multitude of possible solutions to any specified attack. For sure, the number of options is going to be limited by: the technical knowledge and ability, the size and shape of both the attacker and the defender, the environment of combat and the laws of physics.

Out of all the available choices, however, there will probably be one technique that would be an ideal firing solution for the defender in answer to a specific attack by a specific attacker. Conversely, in the real world, the last thing that you want to do is to stop and think about your options, while you attempt to defend yourself. There is no time. Stopping to think about your options is likely to get you into more trouble in a self defense situation.

In the real world of self defense, decisions are far from perfect, you will tend to act on instinct and reflexive response as a result of training in an effort to negotiate your way through to a successful conclusion.

We learn this in the relatively safe haven of the training deck and the competition arena. In the competition arena we learn that it doesn't matter how many techniques you have learned in class. All that matters is what you are capable of performing under stress.

All of which brings me to the main point. There is an aspect of dealing with stressful situations that leads us to the notion of complexity. Complexity is the ability to see a multitude of

possible outcomes to any given situation.

Every choice made, however, inevitably extinguishes all but one of the possible futures that might have existed, and the instant you become aware of what 'might have been' is the moment at which you come face to face with regret. Regret is more often than not about what we didn't do in life rather than what we did. Regret is about the 'lost selves.'

It really doesn't matter what 'might have been', what matters is what IS, and what you choose to do with it and what you choose to learn from it. All of which brings us full circle to training in the martial arts. Just like martial combat, living is a moment by moment sequence of choices. We rarely have the time to consider our options or even see them all. So we make imperfect decisions...and we do it every day, and we live with the consequences. Awareness of our inability to see the best choice from all possible choices, however, can lead us to a sort of paralysis by analysis.

Think about it: Isn't it easier for you to make a choice from a very limited number of options than it is from a broader array of choices?

O.K....so what?

Over time we learn to accept that we do not control outcomes in life anywhere near as much as we might like to think. We learn to see what we gain as well as what we lose through the choices we make.

So the next time you find yourself uncertain and faced with lots of choices, make a decision, accept the inevitable and learn wisdom.

Resilience under stress

Nietzsche is often given credit for making the famous comment, 'that which does not destroy us, makes us stronger'. Well, actually it's not exactly what he said, but it's close enough for us to work with in this article.

What I want to talk about, is the quality of resilience, especially the effect of acquired resilience under stress.

At this time of year, as we come back from the Holidays and get back into our training, we become aware that over the break we have become soft. Over the year, our training has made us fitter, stronger, tougher, and more resistant to the normal aches and pains of training. What our training has done for us, is give us resilience. By placing our bodies and minds in a mildly stressful training environment that pushes our limits, our bodies adapt over time to the training and we see the result as increased levels of fitness and endurance.

Improvements in fitness and higher levels of endurance, however, cannot be achieved *unless* you stress the body, and can easily be lost if you remove the training.

Now let's take this to the environment of daily living. Do we experience stress?

How do we respond to stress? Do we see it as 'good' thing or a 'bad' thing?

Suppose that for a moment, we look at the stresses of living as a tool that enables us to acquire personal resil-

ience in much the same way as physical training makes us fitter.

So what are the possible benefits? Obviously, from my perspective, I would say that we become better able to endure hardship when it comes, and things that we used to see as difficult or stressful, become less so with further experience of life.

Stress is a physical and emotional workout, make no mistake about it. When you are stressed your body feels it, and acts accordingly. Blood pressure can go up, the immune system is affected and we can feel more fatigued. Sometimes we don't want to eat, at other times we eat too much...stress can do all of these things to us and we know it.

Emotionally, stress can leave us vulnerable and sore, sometimes depressed or anxious, worried about outcomes we cannot control and we can obsess about the situation. Stress can leave us feeling trapped and blind, unable to see the answers ahead.

As we negotiate our way through various stresses of life, we acquire an ability to manage with a greater level of grace, we develop an ability to let some of the stresses go. Perhaps we acquire a degree of patience along the road. We cannot fix things immediately, sometimes, things simply take time to work out. In the meantime, practice enables us to carry the burdens with a little more ease and maybe even let the less significant stresses not affect us at all.

We become less easily rocked by stress when it occurs. We get resilient. We get fit! The little waves are easier to handle it's the big waves that can catch us.

Now this is not to say that we become cold, hard, indifferent creatures. On the contrary, I believe that the successful negotiation of stressful situations leaves us more caring, more compassionate, tolerant and understanding.

We begin to understand that all around us, everyday, there are heroes in daily clothes struggling to manage their lives and often facing their inner battles and trials without the comfort of a confidante or companion.

Even though we may not have had the experience personally, we begin to understand the struggle of the father who was recently laid off, or the wife whose husband died without warning, or the child who feels friendless at school...any one of a thousand possible stressful things... and we begin to feel for those around us.

We cannot share their pain, or walk their path, that is something that each of us must do alone, but we can understand and be gentle with those around us, for they struggle too.

I think that resilience to stress makes it is easier for us to laugh too. Simple things can make us smile, and after a stressful event, we can embrace new beginnings with gratitude. How are you this day? ☺

**When you walk, walk.
When you sit, sit.
Above all, do not wobble**

-- Zen Proverb

Board of Directors

Who runs your life?

Simple question...or so it seemed to me when I was first asked it. Upon reflection, however, it is nowhere near as simple as I had thought.

If you look at your life as an entrepreneurial activity, a business of some sort, then it's a good idea to have someone at the helm who knows what they are doing.

I took a personal coaching class a bunch of years ago and was given the problem of defining who was on the Board of Directors for Chris Dewey Inc. Who was my CEO? Who was my CFO? Who were the Board members? Who were my division heads? What were their roles and responsibilities?

The results of my personal investigation were far from thrilling. At the helm of my particular ship of enterprise was a twelve year-old boy. It was the boy who had decided that I was going to be a university professor with a career in geology. Now, we can argue that a twelve year-old can be applauded for having figured out what truly inspires him and for having made a decision about what he wants to do in life, but that same boy had been steering the ship ever since.

A lot of experiences had come and gone in the intervening years. In simple terms, the reasons I did things as a twelve year-old were not the reasons I was doing them as an adult.

The twelve year-old was awed by geological time and the earth as it

was. O.K., he was amazed by dinosaurs too! Well...to be honest any fossil would do...fossils were just cool. He hadn't got the slightest clue about the real size of space and time or the implications of the fact that one is an expression of the other. He had no idea about the existence of the deeper spiritual questions that he would discover later in life, the questions that drove his thirst for understanding.

Moving on through the BoD...

It was not until I actually opened a for-profit business that I began to understand the nuances of financial health and well-being, let alone planning for the future. This was an area of my growing up that I had never considered. My dad had worked for one company for his entire life and when he retired they took care of his pension...or at least that was my perception of things. I had no idea of how my parents had really managed their finances or planned for the future. In terms of my personal BoD...I had no viable candidate for CFO...not a good situation.

Moving on...

By the time I took the coaching course I had already been through a divorce and struggled with depression. I was feeling somewhat adrift in my life and the goals I had set for myself as a kid had either been achieved or were now unimportant or largely irrelevant. So within the BoD structure I began to look around for who was running the

HR department of Chris Dewey Inc....

I am a quiet person by nature. I enjoy solitude and silence. I enjoy being in nature or listening to classical music...so guess who I had put in charge of the marketing division of my life? Not a very wise choice!

I could go on, but by now I guess that you get the picture.

There are lots of pieces of me who have a hand in running my life. It is important to know who is responsible for what.

If your life is going to be successful, it's important to recognize who it is who is guiding your Board of Directors. It's also important to recognize what mandate you have given to your BoD. It's a sort of personal accounting and inventory taking.

Know your skills, where do they come from?

Know your strengths and weaknesses, your blind spots...why do they exist?

Know your goals and driving mechanisms...why are they there? Are they outdated?

Looking at your life from the perspective of a business run by a Board of Directors can be very illuminating, if you are honest with yourself. You might choose to leave things as they are, or you might choose to retire a few folks and make more appropriate appointments in those roles. Enjoy!



**In order to succeed,
Sometimes you have to make something from nothing**

Ruth Mickelby-Land

Decisions and non-decisions

In every choice is its anti-thesis. When I choose to use my time in a particular way, I am by default, choosing not to use my time in any other way.

Likewise, as we said earlier in this month's newsletter, when I choose a life path, I extinguish all other possible paths that could have stemmed from the moment of decision.

If we take this line of thinking a stage further, have you ever considered the possibility that if you do not make a decision to excel in a particular area of performance, you are, in fact, making a decision to be mediocre.

Ouch!!

That hurts...all those things that I never really put much effort into in life, were decisions to be mediocre. O.K. so I justify it by saying that those things weren't important to me or things in which I did not have much interest or talent, but that really doesn't get it does it?

Suppose for an instant that *had* I put in the effort I could have been better...does it matter? Going back to an earlier article in this newsletter, how many 'lost me's' are there out there? How many opportunities did I let slide?

When I left England to pursue a doctorate degree, I never dreamed that I would not return to England to live. For sure, I thought I'd stay overseas for a few years, but that eventually I'd return 'home'. I made a decision to do one thing...follow my dream. I also (apparently) made a decision to be willing to pay the price of never living in my home country again if necessary. I'm not sure that I could see that at the time. Equally, I am not sure that I saw the price that others would pay along with me.

This is one of the great dilemmas of living: The decisions we make not

only affect us, they affect others as well. We make no decisions in a vacuum. The moment you realize this with full force for the first time, you can be paralyzed by the implications and the responsibility that ensues.

In some sense, the moment that you realize that every decision and every non-decision you make affects the lives of others around you, life gets a good deal more complex. You realize that you do not make decisions for yourself, you also make them for others, whether you intend to do so or not.

I suspect that the most impactful way in which this knowledge manifests itself is the awareness that if you have a child, the child was not given a choice in the matter of being conceived and born. Sounds silly doesn't it? But think on it for a moment. Think of all the ways in which the world is changed in both large and small ways simply by bringing a child into the world. Where do the ripples end? Where does your responsibility begin?

The only way in which I have been able to resolve the issue of decision-making is, (as I said earlier) to recognize that every moment of every day we make imperfect decisions in an imperfect world. It is not for me to judge the decisions of others, I have not walked their paths, nor carried their burdens nor understand their struggles.

From my perspective, the best that I can do is to accept that my decisions are far from ideal and that all of us are probably attempting to do the best we can with what we have and with what we know.

I suppose it all comes back to failing our way to success. We learn through failure, we fall over and stand back up and fall over again.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ AKAYAMA BOKKEN CLINIC, SMAA, FEBRUARY 23RD, 2008
- ◆ AKAYAMA SPRING CLINIC, BIRMINGHAM, AL, APRIL, 2008
- ◆ AKAYAMA SUMMER CAMP, NEW ORLEANS, LA, JULY 12-14TH, 2008.

We make decisions, we realize that they were less than ideal and we resolve to improve our decision-making skills.

Once we realize that our decisions affect more than our own lives, our level of responsibility increases and learning to improve our decision-making skills acquires a greater importance.

Life seems to be about increasing our levels of awareness and responsibility. The more we become aware, the more responsibility we acquire. But with awareness and responsibility comes the added responsibility of protecting the freedom of those around us to make their own decisions in their own way.

Ultimately, if we choose to do so, we put ourselves on the path to personal success, we choose to accept that we fall over and that we can hold ourselves responsible for making better decisions over time and that we are not the same person who made the earlier decisions in our lives...if we are growing. We learn a thing or two along the way.



Women's Self Defense Class

When: Saturday, February 16th, 2008, 9:00 till noon

Where: Starkville Martial Arts Academy, 106 S. Lafayette,

- **Turn Fear into Power**
- **Become more aware of your options and your surrounding**
- **Learn how to remain calm and in control in times of stress**

Akayama Ju Jitsu Bokken Clinic

When: Saturday, February 23rd, 2008, 9:00 till 4:00

Where: Starkville Martial Arts Academy, 106 S. Lafayette,

- **Learn basics of sword work**

Akayama Ju Jitsu Weapons Clinic

When: Saturday, April 6th, 2008, 9:00 till 4:00

Where: Trussville Dojo, Alabama

- **Train with all the weapons of the Akayama Ryu system**

**For registration information contact Ania: 323 5522 or
ania@starkvillemartialarts.com**