

Pathways

A SOMETIMES MONTHLY NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY CHRIS DEWEY MARTIAL ARTS, INC.

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*Never confuse your mistakes
with your value as a human
being
-- Anonymous*

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Begin with the end in mind

So I was talking about being a child with one of my students the other day. Our conversation rolled around to making career decisions and when we decide who we want to be when we grow up.

I knew I wanted to be geologist by the time I was twelve. I remember having mumps when I was eleven and while I was sick, I read all of my sister's 'Knowledge' magazines that had anything to do with fossils and dinosaurs. Later, I became enthralled by anything to do with the notion of 'deep time' and I still am.

The thing of it was though, that I had no real idea of how my life would pan out. I knew that I wanted to be a university professor, but I didn't really have much of a plan for getting there. It wasn't until later that I developed anything like a plan.

So I knew two things: where I was, and what I wanted....the space between was, well....life. So far, I have learned to roll with the punches, scratch with the turkeys, soar with the eagles and get up one more time than I fell over.

Somewhere in the back of my mind there has always been a picture of how I want this thing I call life to end and it certainly is not lying bed with a stack load of regrets. When people ask, I invariably tell them that I'd like to take my last breath with the thought 'Wow! That was a blast.'

That was a long introduction.

So where am I going with this?

Whenever we set out on a task, how often do we know where we want it to go? When I opened my business, I had no idea of where it would go or what

it would become, but knowing where my business would go is a critical part of strategic thinking. If I don't know what I want my business to look like when it's done...how will I know what to look for when it IS done? When can I say that I have achieved my goals, if I don't know what they are? Worse than that, if I don't have any idea of what I want my business to become, it could become something that I never intended....in fact...it will....because I never 'intended' anything.

So my message is simple...and every kid and every parent in the dojo knows this: *"Know what you want. Have a plan (and success coach). Take consistent action. Review your progress and renew your goals."*

Begin with the end in mind. Know what your actions will achieve for you and modify them to achieve your desired outcomes.

You may never reach your desired end point, but at least you will be embarked upon the correct journey. If you know what you want to achieve you are more likely to achieve it, than if you don't. Having a definite end point also leaves you with the possibility of creating something new if you reach one of your destinations. You can look at your end points like ports of call on a life cruise. If you don't have ports of call...well you may be in the boat, but you have no idea where it's headed or maybe even why you are on the ocean in the first place.

It's your life, and it will be full of opportunities. How you use them is up to you, but there are times when knowing where you are headed can be really valuable information. ☺

Technical Excellence

Let's talk about something that lies at the heart of being a martial artist and for that matter to any field of endeavor in which we wish to excel. I want to talk about technique and skill.

I have spoken about this before, but it bears repeating, lest we forget the message and slide into a zone of comfortable achievement.

A technique is a thing we learn, it is a piece of a puzzle or tactical tool. We can give a technique a name or a label of some sort. Skill, on the other hand, represents the strategic ability to use techniques in a seamless, efficient and effortless fashion. Skill is the outcome of untold numbers of repetition. You can't name a skill in the same way as you can a technique, but you can see the skillful use of a technique. Skill is therefore a testament to quality of the learning experience, and technique is a tool of the learning environment. We may learn techniques, but it is skill that we seek.

Each time we repeat a technique we make small adjustments as we evaluate our ability to produce the desired outcome. By constantly monitoring practice performance, improving the quality of our repetitions and performing the technique in the setting in which it will be required, the technique slowly evolves into a skill. The key here is slowly, there is no substitute for experienced-based learning....you either do the repetitions, or you remain unskilled.

Mastery in any field of endeavor therefore, comes from only one place: Repetition in the crucible of learning. Great performers do not necessarily have very flamboyant techniques, but they do perform the basics with an astounding mastery. Thus, skill becomes the external demonstration of an internalized technique. You can see this on the

tournament circuit: Skillful competitors have refined their actions to such a level that people of lesser experience are totally outmatched.

We can all aspire to be great technicians given the time, desire, repetition and sweat. Eventually, some of us might even become skillful.

I believe, however, that there is another level, which is attainable. This is the level of 'mindless ability'. In these very, very rare circumstances you meet a student who has practiced for so many years that the movement of energy, which defines the execution of a skill is so efficient that you do not see the person performing, you simply see an effortless performance. The action becomes a thing of beauty.

Now, here is a goal worthy of attainment.

Setting this level of attainment as your goal will keep you forever on the path. Sometimes I am criticized me for expecting perfection, or placing the bar too high, even for myself....so much so that I am doomed to my own failure. Perhaps there is a grain of truth in the criticism, but I tend to from the position that if we seek to achieve mastery, then 'Good enough' will never be acceptable and excellence is always a beginning point. There are of course some things for which mastery is not a goal, and then 'good enough' is good enough. But if you seek mastery of anything, then setting the goal of 'mindless ability' or 'effortless performance' will keep you humble. Oddly enough, if you can keep to the goal, it will even keep you training in times of doubt and through the plateaus of frustration. Setting this level of skill as your goal will help you keep an open mind and an empty cup. Every time you step on the deck you will know that you are still a beginner, still learning, still climbing

the mountain.

Occasionally, you will look back at the view, but then you look ahead at the summit and realize there is still much climbing to do. Sometimes, I wonder what that view will look like, and I even wonder whether I shall see the view, but in the greater schemes of things it is not the view from the top that is of value, it's the journey itself. Each view along the way acquires the value of the sweat expended to get there.

Technical ability is therefore a commodity that can be continually refined; it is not a fixed quality; there is always room for more practice. Consequently, mastery in any field of endeavor knows only one teacher....experience. Everything else is rhetoric. There are no short cuts, no substitutes and no quitting.

One of the most wonderful things that I have learned from being a university professor, an entrepreneur, a martial artist, and a father is that the well of knowledge is infinitely deep and that no matter what I learn; it is miniscule in comparison to what I have yet to learn.

From the perspective of the martial arts, in addition to the physical techniques, we also learn to be determined but not stubborn, we learn to get up one more time than we are knocked over, we learn to study, to listen, to pay attention to the details and we learn that quitting is simply not an option.

Building skill in any arena of activity is a hard task. Training is an uncompromising task master...but I think that we all know this in our hearts, which is why we settle for 'good enough' so often when excellence is just out of our immediate reach. It's also a reason why we allow ourselves to remain mediocre, when we could astound. Now there's a wake up call for every one of us! ☯

Staying the Course

One of the things that being an entrepreneur and a college professor has shown me in stark reality is the concept of 'staying the course.'

Obviously, there is the simple lesson of opening a business or teaching class: Some people keep going and some do not.

By most standards of the entrepreneurial world, my business is a success, I have outlived most of the statistical realities of a start-up martial arts school and am approaching my fifteenth year in business. At other levels of investigation, however, my business has never achieved the economic levels of success that a truly thriving business can boast. I would consider the dojo to be marginally successful insofar as it has been able to weather its crises and emerge from each of them a little wiser and stronger.

Then there are the clients and students who are served by my business. There have been thousands of them. Some have been with me for more than a decade, some are with me so long as they are in Starkville and then they move on with their lives and my role is done. There are others who do martial arts for only a little while and then leave us. There are those who make it to black belt and those who don't. Not that black belt is the final arbiter of success...it is not. In and of itself, black belt means very little. I have seen children turn their lives around as yellow belts, it is never a question of rank...it is always a question of desire and opportunity. The more difficult question to

answer about staying the course is knowing when to keep going and knowing when to change course.

I remember as a boy in high school when I had to let mathematics go as one of my university entrance subjects. It was an incredibly difficult choice. If I stopped doing mathematics, I was going to severely limit my university choices and if I kept going, there was a very real chance that I would fail the mathematics university qualifying exams and not go to university at all. I changed courses, literally and figuratively, and on that day, my life changed.

There have been other moments and will no doubt be more, when I have come or will come face to face with the decision of staying the current course or making a course change. This is true for every one of us...we all face such moments.

Some of us change courses because we are overwhelmed. Some of us change because of lack of interest. Some of us because we lack the talent or ability. Some of us change courses because we see new opportunities and chances for advancement and growth.

Equally, some of us stay the course because we are motivated and enriched. Some of us stay because we are still learning and growing. Some of us stay because we feel that we should stay or ought to stay or it is expected that we stay. Some of us fear the humiliation or regret of changing course. Some of us stay because of the devil we know.

There will be many reasons that we feel the need to change courses (or not), but as a friend of mine

recently commented: Make sure that you are running to something and not away from something.

Few of us can see the future with clarity or assurance. We rarely have sufficient insight to see how a decision will play out in the long run. I suspect, however, that each of us, in our core being knows whether we are running away from, or towards, something...or if there is an element of both.

Even though we may not see the outcomes of taking a particular path, we inevitably take lessons from our experiences and build our future decisions upon those we have already made.

Inevitably each of us will face moments of truth, when we either keep going on the path we are on, or take a new path, sometimes cutting a path where none has existed previously.

Life decisions are rarely easy and often quite painful, but they are inevitable. It takes courage to stay the course and it takes courage to change courses. Never underestimate this. Even when we make the right decisions, for the right reasons there may still be regret associated with the pain of our decisions, and perhaps this is where courage plays its part. We cannot undo the past, only move forward.

I suspect that wisdom has a lot to do with knowing when to stay the course and when to change courses. Wisdom, however, comes from only one place: Personal experience. One of the things about staying the course or changing courses, therefore, is that we have the wisdom to do it for the right reasons. ☺

Strategic versus tactical thinking

We are often told that we need to think strategically and that, by extension, tactical thinking is somehow a lower level ability. It's sort of like seeing the forest or the trees...as though there is some inherent benefit of doing one over the other.

I suppose that if you try to pin me down I'm a forest sort of guy. I like to see the big picture, but without the details of the trees the forest is quite worthless to me. From my perspective, I like to see the forest at the right time and the trees at the right time. I like to be able to change my focus according to need. So it is with strategic and tactical thinking.

History teaches us that strategy does not survive the first engagement of armed conflict and that once armies meet, a thousand little tactical decisions will undo the grandest of strategies.

From years of experience as a competitive martial artist, I can tell you there is a degree of truth in the statement. I can plan out my strategy of how a match will unfold, but the instant my partner/opponent grabs me in a Judo match, the strategy is in need of revision and tactical thinking takes over. I have to survive this moment if I am going to survive the next...and so it goes on. The match lurches from tactical moment to tactical moment. The only time when this is not true is when one opponent so outclasses the other that the strategic advantage becomes so overwhelming that the weaker player is simply playing a losing game of catch up.

In the rarified moments of truly

inspired pure action there is neither strategic, nor tactical thinking, there is only the natural flow of action without thought, but those moments are rarer than hen's teeth. So, in our day to day lives we are faced with the juxtaposition of the moments within which we have to act and make decisions (the trees) and the overall strategy of where we would like our lives to be going (the forest).

Again, there is something ecological in all of this, you can't have a forest without trees and yet one tree does not a forest make. So it is with strategy and tactics. You cannot have strategy without tactical implementation, but a tactical action does not a strategy reveal.

Sun Tsu talks a lot about this in the Chinese classic: "The Art of War." I recommend this to all of you, no matter what you do in life or what you want to achieve...Sun Tsu has something of value to tell you about how you are doing it.

But let's get back to strategy and tactics. Strategy is our overall plan of attack, tactical action is where the rubber meets the road. All the strategy in the world is a worthless mind game if you don't put it into action. Conversely, all the action in the world is meaningless if you have no reason for its execution. Strategy and tactics are the yin and yang of living in the moment. You can have great plans, but lack the follow through, but they're a waste of thought. Likewise, if you are running on the hamster wheel of life with no thought for what you wish to achieve or where it is taking you, then there is plenty of action for sure, but much of it is

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

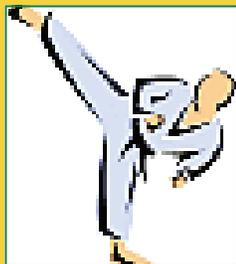
- ◆ FRAYSER JUDO TOURNAMENT, MEMPHIS, TN, MARCH 28TH 2009
- ◆ SMAC KARATE TOURNAMENT, GREENWOOD, MS, MARCH 21ST, 2009
- ◆ SMAA PIF SPARATHON, STARKVILLE, MS, MARCH 7TH, 2009
- ◆ SMAA KIDS SPARRING TOURNAMENT, STARKVILLE, APRIL 4TH, 2009
- ◆ AKAYAMA RYU, GULF SHORES, JULY 17-18TH, 2009

merely empty gesturing.

In either case there is a trap and in both cases, a balance is missing.

One of the neat things about being a geologist and an ecologist by training is that I look for balance in the sciences as an indicator of higher truth. When systems are out of balance they are attempting to convey something to me. When systems are in balance, there is something for me to learn from how they work. All too often, however, we get into oscillation problems, where fixing one thing destabilizes something else and so on, until it is all but impossible to return to the original balance. Perhaps that's one of the appeals of the martial arts to me...it's all about balance.

So it is with strategic and tactical thinking...we can learn to be masters of both. We could learn to see the forest AND the trees. ☺



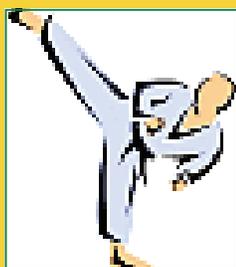
TAEKWONDO TOURNAMENT

Saturday, April 4, 2009

Registration begins at 8 a.m.

Children's Tournament at 9 a.m.

Adult's Tournament to follow.



**\$15 before March 30
\$20 after March 30
Double Eliminations
Awards for 1st, 2nd, 3rd place**

***For enrollment information contact us at 323 5522 or
smaa@starkvillemartialarts.com***