

Pathways

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“The important thing is this: to be able to sacrifice what we are for what we could become”

—Charles Du Bois

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Timing is Everything

I am frequently asked how I manage to juggle a university career, an entrepreneurial business, running the national coaching program for the United States Judo Association and my writing and publishing activities. Which is to say nothing of making time to spend with my family and quiet time to read, study and reflect. I rarely stop to ask myself this question. In part, this is how I have always been, but that doesn't really get it... especially if you are the one who just asked this question. So let's see if I can help somewhat.

I guess that for me the secret of doing more in less time comes down to a series of watchwords:

- Priorities
- Organization
- Value
- Desire
- Concentration

The result is that I can be extremely effective doing a lot of things in a seemingly small amount of time.

To set the stage, it would probably be important to tell you that I do not watch television. My wife and I occasionally watch movies, but we never watch T.V., which means that when we are at home we are together as a family, not playing slave to the gods of media entertainment. In and of itself this might seem like a small thing, but think about how much time you spend every week watching T.V. and you will see how quickly you can lose family time for interacting, talking and playing together.

Next, I suspect I am no different to most of you: Give me something I

want to do and I can remain engrossed for hours, give me something I don't want to do and I will find ways to procrastinate.

All of which brings me to my main points:

1. Procrastination gets a bad wrap. I use procrastination in a beneficial way, especially when I am writing. I let my mind sift and sort the ideas until they are fully formed and then I write. I don't sit down with an empty notebook and stare at the screen in an attempt to force the words. When I write I do so because the quiet creative juices have done their job and it is time to let the words flow from my mind to the keyboard.
2. I always set priorities based upon the value of the task to my greater goals. Having said that, my greater goals are not what other people might choose for me, but that's not at issue here. I only get one day at a time and I will use the time as effectively and efficiently as I see fit. So I look at what needs to get done and I prioritize the tasks.
3. If at all possible, I answer my mail immediately, rather than let it gnaw on me and pile up.
4. I never let a piece of paper sit on my desk without purpose or an action plan. I know why it's there and when I will get to it. Moreover, I like to have the rule that I handle a piece of paper only twice: Once to read it and set a priority for action and once to act on it before filing it or trashing it (permanent filing).

5. I believe in organization. I abhor clutter and disorganization. Organization for me also goes one step further: Finish what you start. While I do multi-task, I always finish what I begin before I pick up a major new task.
 6. When I look at my task list, if there is something that can be done in five minutes or less, I do it and remove it.
 7. I never eat an elephant for breakfast! I tackle big jobs in bite sized pieces, if necessary by breaking the job down to smaller tasks that become part of a project timeline.
 8. I always attack the most important task first, regardless of its size. If I am doing more than one thing at a time like working on a big project and several smaller ones, I will ration my time accordingly. This takes experience and discipline, but don't let the guru's fool you... it is eminently doable....provided you are strict with yourself. By way of example currently my projects include writing columns for MAPro magazine, writing a paper for my academic research, preparing the USJA Level III manual for press, writing the Pathways newsletters and rewriting a course for next Fall's teaching on campus.... on top of my daily requirements. I don't say this to boast, I say it because I want to demonstrate that it is possible to work on several projects at the same time, achieve closure on all of them and do so using clear time management strategies and an awareness of the timeline available.
 9. Which neatly brings me to my next point: Plan ahead. Too many people I know put off tasks until the last minute or, end up reacting to deadlines rather than pro-acting and by doing so create flexibility. Again, by way of example I know that I have two monthly deadlines....every month: I have to write a copy of this newsletter and I have to submit a column to MAPro magazine. By pro-acting, I can get myself several months *ahead* of my MAPro deadlines, which gives me flexibility in dealing with projects that might take longer than I planned, or new projects that I had not factored into my schedule.
 10. So that's the next point isn't it? We can have plans and goals and deadlines, but chaos theory is always at work and our bosses or our jobs may land things on us that we didn't see coming. If I am using effective time management skills, am being proactive and am ahead of the work curve in some areas, I can handle the unexpected without undue amounts of extra stress. Moreover, because I am used to handling projects and getting closure within the prescribed deadline, I have a sense of optimism about the likelihood of meeting an unexpected deadline or an extra task on little or no notice.
 11. Next, when you work, concentrate to the exclusion of all else. Sometimes, when I am working, I will not hear someone speaking to me...especially if I am writing. I get focused on the flow of words and everything else in the world fades away. Although a very useful skill, this can also have two downsides....I do not intend to ignore people, but sometimes it seems as though that is what I am doing and secondly, I don't like interruptions. Taken together, the art of concentration is exactly that: An art...it takes a good deal of self monitoring and a willingness to adapt. I have learned over time that it is better for me to find places and times when I will not be interrupted to do the work that takes deep concentration and to do work that takes less "effort", when I am likely to be interrupted. In part, this is a skill of communication. It's about learning to work around, and with, people without letting them distract you from what needs to get done, but also showing them caring and respect.
 12. Lastly, but perhaps most important of all: You have to be willing to put in the effort. Quite frankly, if you are not willing to put in the effort, to see things through, to endure until the job is done, then all the other skills are a waste of effort. Great time management takes discipline. If you don't believe in the worth of the activity, you will be less likely to put in the hours to complete the task. I suspect that this has a lot to do with hours lost on the job. Many people have jobs, few people are devoted to them or see a higher purpose for having them beyond the pay check that the job provides. Show me someone who is passionate about his or her job and I will show you someone who is putting in the extra hours, who has great time management and who more than likely suffers less daily stress as a result of the job.
- So there you have it: Dr. Dewey's keys to effective time management. I am sure that you can refine these ideas and make them work in your own lives and I am equally sure that you will feel a greater sense of accomplishment, control and success as a result. The big payoff is that you will also feel a lot less stress, and that will give you more energy for things like your family and your relationships... and that just has to be a good thing. It will also create a positive feedback loop back to your work life. ☺

Patience

One of the hardest things in the world to do, for some of us, is...wait. Now this is the point at which you might expect me to launch into a discussion about delaying gratification, but that's not the angle I want to take.

There is an old Inuit tale about a group of Eskimos who went south in search of grass for hay and when they found that the field was too short, they simply sat down and waited for the grass to grow....now **that's** patience!

Sometimes, when we learn about leadership skills we are told that the ability to make decisions is a mark of leadership. Implicit in this statement is often the idea that we are to make decisions, any decision rather than delay the decision making process.

I think that sometimes the right decision is to delay, to be patient and to wait. But patience is an art form, you have to know when to wait for an obstruction to move aside and when to break it down or move around it, under it or over it.

I want to use an example from the life of Ernest Shackleton. After his men were stranded on the south polar ice sheet, he chose to make camp and wait. He waited because the ice sheet was rotating and as it moved, it would carry his camp and his men closer to the ocean and possible safety. In his case, the right answer was to be patient, rather than exhausting his men and using up precious supplies. It took incredible leadership skills to sit and wait, but he was motivated by the commitment he felt to the lives of his

men.

Patience is difficult. It is often easier for us to be doing something rather than wait.

More than anywhere else, I see this in students of the martial arts. We force ourselves to get more flexible, become stronger, more forceful, quicker, more agile....you get the idea. In some ways our goals are highly commendable, but we seem to forget that our bodies take time to adapt and our brains take time to learn and our spirits take time to forge. We do not become all that we want in a moment. It takes time. It takes patience.

There is a very fine balancing act here. The art is to balance patience with tenacity of effort. The art is always to learn how far to push yourself to achieve your goals and when to wait for growth.

If thirty five years in the martial arts has taught me anything it is that there are lessons in everything and that patience is a part of grace. When we open ourselves to the possibility of learning through all things, we become aware that waiting is a lesson in itself and that this lesson too contains other lessons from which further growth is possible. We could learn a thing or two from nature here... When nature goes hog wild about something there is normally a system collapse coming (have you talked with a lemming recently?) Conversely, trees grow slowly, using periods of dormancy to store energy for the next pe-

riod of growth. Much is the same with our martial training...I watch impatient students push themselves until they either get hurt or burn out. I watch patient students overcome obstacle after obstacle as they mature in the martial ways.

Patience, I believe is one of the key ingredients of tenacity. If you want to persist at something, you must have the will to do the work and the patience to see the job to its conclusion, even if on occasion, it means waiting.

As always, however, the martial ways are merely a metaphor for our daily lives, our jobs and our relationships. Too often we are impatient with our bosses, our employees, our families and our friends. We do not grant them (or ourselves for that matter) the time to grow and develop. We place (often unspoken) expectations upon each other and then attack each other for failure to perform. Too frequently, I see that we simply failed to provide adequate understanding of what was required, or tools for the job, or correct training or enough time to perform.

You can thank my young son for this article...sometimes raising a four year-old is itself a lesson in patience. The lesson is about getting explanation and the expectation in synch with our son's current abilities and understanding of the universe and being patient enough for him to discover the correct path with the minimal number of breadcrumbs....☺

If the world is cold, make it your business to build fires.

-Horace Traubel

Endurance and Optimism

Have you ever read about Sir Ernest Shackleton? Quite possibly he was the most unfortunate explorer of his age. He failed to reach the South Pole and had to turn back a mere 97 miles from his goal. He failed to cross the Antarctic continent on his second expedition, and on that occasion never even made land fall on the continent. On his third expedition, he died from a heart attack before ever reaching Antarctica.

Yet, it is Shackleton who personifies all that is most noble about the pioneering spirit. To study Scott and Shackleton is a study in contrasts. Shackleton was the consummate leader; concerned more for the lives of his men than fulfilling his dreams. For sure, Scott took his men all the way to the South Pole, but his ego cost him his life, the lives of his men and his dreams. Shackleton on the other hand never reached any of his exploration and discovery goals, but he kept his crew alive.

Perhaps it was the name of his ship that personified the man and his character: Endurance. The name pretty much says it all.

Imagine if you will, taking a wooden ship to Antarctica and getting it frozen in the ice as winter closed in. There was no hope of a rescue and only the crew's ingenuity, skill and spirit to keep them all alive. Eventually the ship is crushed by the ice and the crew has to abandon their vessel, taking the life boats with them across the ice to the ocean in the hope of being able to get themselves to safety.

When Shackleton took a diverse group of men on a mission to cross the Antarctic, it was ultimately his personal will that kept his men in good spirits, free of scurvy and alive after wintering in an ice bound ship, dragging their three little life boats across the ice, rowing across the open ocean, leaving his men on a small island and heading out across one of the world's

harshest oceans at the worst possible time of year in search of aid. He survived one of the most amazing feats of maritime history when he and a five of his colleagues took one of the life boats from Elephant Island across the Antarctic Ocean to South Georgia Island. After making landfall on the wrong side of the island, Shackleton and two colleagues were the first men ever to trek across an ice covered, mountainous island to find a whaling community from which he could gain help.

I sometimes wonder if he ever really faced the possibility of failure. He endured, he did what was necessary to ensure the safety of his men and he overcame hardships that would have seemed insurmountable to the vast majority of us.

Not one of his men died.

I remember reading three books as a boy in school that all told tales of daring do: I read "The Ascent of Everest", "Scott of the Antarctic" and Shackleton's story of the Endurance. At the time Shackleton's story didn't do much for me because it seemed, to the schoolboy at least, to be all about failure. It was not until much later in life that I could see the story in its true light and see in Shackleton the true qualities of leadership.

Each perceived "failure" drew out of Shackleton a deeper measure of greatness and a sense of personal power that would sustain the lives of his men. It takes rare skills to do such a thing.

So when I look around me for role models of leadership, I frequently fall to the story of Ernest Shackleton, a man driven by a dream, possessed of a passion and yet dedicated and devoted to the lives of his men.

We could all learn a lot from the study of Shackleton's life, so if you have not read the story, I would strongly urge you to do so.

You will not be disappointed. ☺

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- ◆ Gentle wind Kata clinic, Baton Rouge, LA, March 12th, 2005
- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament, Greenwood, MS, March 26th, 2005
- ◆ Frayser Judo Tournament, Memphis, TN, April 2nd, 2005
- ◆ 3rd Ippon Open Judo Tournament, Peachtree City, GA, April 16th, 2005
- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS May 20th, 2005
- ◆ Charlotte Judo Camp, N.C., June 22nd through 26th, 2005.
- ◆ USJA Junior National s, Toledo, OH, July 1-2nd, 2005
- ◆ USJI Junior Olympics, Atlanta, GA, July 23-24th, 2005
- ◆ SMAA Open Judo Tournament, September, 2005
- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS November 18th, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior national s, Boca Raton, FL, 2006
- ◆ USJA Junior National s, Indianapolis, IN, 2007

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