

Pathways

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"Failure is an event, not a person"

Zig Ziglar

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Look, Listen and Think

Another lesson from my boy. Eric and I were out in the woods on the weekend and my son was getting an introduction to some nature skills.

Mostly the lessons were about observing the small things, not getting in a rush and paying attention to the details. More than once we told him to look, listen and think before making a decision about which way to go or what to do next.

It was all simple, basic boy scout stuff, but there is so much more there isn't there? How often do we truly take time to look, listen and think when we are faced with an argumentative person? How often do we pay attention to the details when we are faced with a fast approaching deadline at work?

As with most things in nature, the lessons are there to be learned if you are willing to pay attention and meet nature with an open mind. If you learn from your experiences, nature is willing to teach you a lot. The secrets are there in the open, ready to be discovered. The problem is, that most of the time we are in too much of a hurry to stop and learn.

One of the things that bothers me about today's style of living is that we don't take time to really get out into nature and when we do, we leave it behind us when we return to our everyday world.

I believe that there is much for a child (of any age) to learn when we take time to leave our cell phones and iPods behind and get muddy.

Amazingly enough, it all goes back to the martial arts again....

When you train, take time to study,

really study the moves. Your body has lessons for you about how to do something. There is an economic and efficient way of doing every martial arts move. There are lessons to be learned from taking the time to slow down and feel how your body moves. Take time to discover what is natural.

One of the things we do as a family is to eat as close to nature as possible. By that I mean that we avoid processed foods and "refined" anything. We like to eat whole grains, fresh fruit and vegetables and such. The point to this is that if we eat restaurant meals or have to eat processed meals more than occasionally, our bodies let us know. Because we listen to our bodies, we feel it...we feel sluggish....not balanced.

It's the same with sitting in air conditioned comfort all the time and breathing processed air....we need to get good lung-fulls of fresh, clean air. It is no wonder to me that so many of us develop allergies these days.

So where does this leave us?

I believe that it leaves us living disconnected, unnatural lives. In our efforts to separate ourselves from the planet we have forgotten that we are also dust and renew ourselves from the Earth everyday.

So the next time you get angry at a spouse, co-worker, boss, teacher, student....take time to look, listen and think. See if there is a natural way to establish harmony again. Take time to pay attention to the details and see what you are missing and perhaps a resolution will appear that will be a win/win for everyone. ☺

Getting Lost

Sometimes I feel lost in life. Sometimes, life seems to wrap itself around me with confusing and seemingly irresolvable issues. I suspect that anyone who has ever been married, had children, owned a business or tried to balance family and career has felt something similar.

Life is not always plain sailing. But at the risk of taking the previous article too far, let's pick up on a thread and tease it a little.

Two of the things that have been impressed upon me by my teachers from kindergarten through graduate school, by business leaders I have studied, by elite Judo athletes turned coach and by almost every one of my mentors at some time or another are that successful people:

1. Pay attention to the details and
2. See things through.

So what does that mean?

Well maybe it's as simple as writing a letter to a potential employer and knowing when to use their, there and they're. Maybe it's as simple as calling up after the letter has been submitted and sending copies to the people who will act as your references. Maybe it's as simple as having a clean, sharp-looking resume, crafted to sell benefits to a would-be employer as opposed to having a one-size-fits-all resume that gets sent to everyone, regardless.

Maybe it's staying fit with exercise and a healthy diet, and having mechanisms in place to let the stress go.

Paying attention to the details takes too long for most of us, we've got too much to do and too many things that

need to be done NOW! I guess, it also goes back to something I wrote about a couple of months ago....good enough, just isn't.

People for whom good enough is good enough rarely pay attention to the details....but there's more....

If a job is worth doing it's worth doing....poorly the first time. That's right. I did say poorly. In the martial arts, when we learn a new move we do it very poorly the first few thousand times and then we declare that it's good enough and move on.

Truly successful martial artists decide that the first few thousand repetitions were just figuring out what bits go where and how to move around. Then the serious work begins and the detail oriented person, (for whom good enough never will be) starts taking the move apart and really studying it piece by piece. Nothing is too small to escape notice: Times to breathe, which muscles to involve and which ones to relax, what order to use the muscles most efficiently, weight balancing and shifting. It all counts.

In the nearly immortal words of Brian Tracy: 'Everything counts, nothing is neutral.'

O.K., so at this point you are probably wondering what the heck any of this has to do with the title of the article or the first paragraph.

It's really quite simple really....or at least it appears so in my mind.

I tend to get lost in life when I ignore things. Likewise I get lost, when I forget to follow through on things and when I do not pay attention to living in the present moment.

I sometimes think that we are in such

a rush to get to tomorrow that we forget about living for today. Just a small detail of timing.

Those irresolvable issues that come up can normally be resolved by looking, truly looking at the details; listening, truly listening to those around us and thinking, truly, deeply thinking about the implications of what we discover.

I guess also for me, this is where meditation comes into its own.

When perplexed or lost, I turn inward and meditate. I don't search for an answer like a squirrel looking for hazelnuts. Rather I simply allow my mind to wonder around, not judging any of the information it presents to me. I simply observe the thoughts that come and let them go. Then I set an intent to locate the best solution for all parties concerned and let it go too.

Then I wait.

Meditation, like prayerful supplication has a lot to do with waiting and not seeking what I want, but what is best.

The link here is that no detail is too small to observe. Sometimes, when I am perplexed by an issue, it is a seemingly insignificant comment made by someone in passing that ends up holding the key to the whole dilemma. But you know what? If my mind isn't open enough to see it, or if I am not paying attention to the details, I'd probably miss it.

Which brings me to my last point here: Paying attention to the details isn't an OCD-like response to living. It is more of an awareness of 'now' in its entirety, rather than being so wrapped up in things that we lose touch with the world and ourselves.

☺

The future belongs always to the believers, those who are for something rather than those who are against something

Unknown

Getting Thrown

Years ago, when I was training in Canada, I was fortunate enough to be at a coaching clinic where one of the clinicians changed the way I thought about Judo. The man I met had been training since he was a young man, but had been trained as a team throwing dummy. In the club in which he trained, there were players who were the “competition team”, and they trained hard for national-level competitions in France. As the young man was being thrown over and over by the competition team members he was learning valuable lessons, but had no idea just exactly what it was that he was learning.

Here’s the first message: We don’t often see the value in something until later.

The implication of this part of the message is that it is not a good idea to judge something too early because there may well be unforeseen benefits. As the young man trained he didn’t complain or fuss, after all, this was the way that people were trained. He simply took the falls over and over, getting slammed into the mat week after week. But every once in a while he frustrated a throw by changing his hip angle or moving aside as the attacker came in for the throw. He told us that he would always apologize and then get slammed on the next few dozen throws and then try the move again to see if he could stop the attack.

Lesson number two: Give yourself fully to learning, ask nothing from the experience but insight. Give your best to the learning, but also be willing to see possibilities as they emerge.

The implication of this part of the message is about learning to keep an open mind, an open heart and often open ears and a closed mouth.

As the years went by the man kept training and was still a white belt. He was never ranked, but kept being used as the club throwing dummy until one day the team was scheduled to meet at a train station to go to a tournament in another part of the country. One of the team members had broken his ankle outside of class and could not compete, but because the tournament required a specific number of players for each team, the team coach decided that the young man would have to fill a spot.

Bear in mind this young man was put into the team as a filler, not because he was expected to win, after all he’d never learned a single throw.

As it turned out he won every match in short order. Over the course of the next few tournaments, he became a highly skilled competitor. How did it happen?

Every time he had been thrown in practice, he had learned how to do the throw. He had also learned how to stop almost any attack and turn it to his advantage.

Lesson number three: Lessons are not always what they appear to be, either to the student or the teacher.

The implication of this lesson is that there are hidden meanings behind almost everything that we learn, which may only become obvious when we find ourselves in a different environment.

I am a great believer in the fact that if

you want to learn Judo or any of the throwing arts, there is only one path: Get thrown.....a lot.

The problem is that getting thrown brings us face to face with our fears and phobias. It brings up issues of trust in self and trust in others; after all getting thrown by someone else is about giving your life to another person and saying “I trust you to take care of me”.

Not everyone makes that particular transition, and progress in the throwing-based martial arts can often be directly related to overcoming our fears.

But then again, isn’t that true of our success in any field?

How many people succeed when they are frozen by fear or trapped by phobia? Sooner or later the only path forward is to ‘face the fear and do it anyway’.

But there’s a lesson there too. Some people make a statement about facing their fears: ‘Hey look at me, I’m doing this and I’m scared of it’, whereas some people never admit their fears to other people and they quietly overcome their fears one day at a time.

There is a big difference between the internal victories in life and the external victories.

Over the years as a university professor and as a business owner I have met hundreds of unsung heroes who have quietly overcome major fears in their lives and gone on to success.

To each of you: Thank you for your quiet example, the inspiration that you have given me and the lessons that you have taught me. ☺

If you could do better....should you?

Modeling

One of the things I do in my spare time is scale model building. Mostly I build kits that require a lot of detailed work and can stand a degree of unique modification (read: I like kits where I don't have to follow ALL the instructions and can use my own creativity and imagination).

So, at this point you might be thinking that this has nothing to do with life skills development, but stick with me.

I tend to believe that if you watch a master in any field of endeavor, you will find similar skills, so in this article, I want to look at the skills of a master-model builder.

If we leave aside the skills of concentration and patience that are developed by scale model making for the moment, there are some other skills, which model-making builds that directly impact what we do as martial artists.

I was reading one of the modeling trade journals the other day and one of the articles talked about the mistakes that master modelers make during the construction of a kit.

When you look at a highly detailed, carefully constructed kit, built by a master model builder, you tend to see the finished product. There is always a 'Wow!' factor when you look at the work of a master craftsman.

But in reality what you are seeing is years of dedication to the art of building. You are seeing the culmination of decades of attention to detail and the ability to recover from a mistake.

Are you beginning to see the parallels yet?

It's not that master modelers don't make mistakes, it's that they learn to overcome them and create a work of art in which the mistakes are not visible to the untrained eye. Sometimes the mistakes are not even visible to the trained eye because they have been so skillfully repaired. In some cases damage to a model can be converted to an integral part of the construction itself,

so as to appear as battle damage or the effects of use.

It is my contention that we all make mistakes in life, some large, some small. How we deal with them, what we do with them and what we learn from them are the critical issues. It's not about living a mistake-free life, it's about turning the mistakes into something positive.

When we make mistakes in life there is a tendency to get frustrated, angry, guilty, ashamed or any one of a number of negative emotions. When we mess up in the martial arts, we tend to get frustrated, beat ourselves up and can engage in negative thought processes. When we build models and mess up, there can be a lot of frustration and anger, but with time something neat emerges....

In life, in the martial arts and in model building there is an opportunity to greet our mistakes with a series of questions:

- What can I do with this?
- What can I learn from this?
- How can I turn this into an opportunity?
- How can I incorporate this into my life so that I build a better life?

The difference between a master and a novice in any field is the ability to see beyond the mistake to something better than what already exists.

In life, in the martial arts and in model-making the bottom line is always the notion of hope in the final product that is built upon the seeds of potential.

Life is about seeing beyond who we are at the present moment to who we might become. It is also about seeing the people around us as works in progress and being tolerant of their faults (as if ours aren't so obvious)! Life is about living in hope and seeing potential all around us. ☺

April						
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29	30					

March						
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11	12	13	14	14	16	17
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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

- ◆ SMAC Tournament, Greenwood, March 24th., 2007
- ◆ Frayser Judo Tournament, Memphis, TN, March 31st, 2007
- ◆ Akayama clinic, Charlotte, NC. April 14th., 2007
- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS, April 28th, 2007
- ◆ Peachtree City Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA, April 28th, 2007

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