

Pathways

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“Be kind; every man you meet is fighting a hard battle”

—Ian Maclaren

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Responsible, reliable and really useful

It seems that this month I will draw examples from the lives of young people, as you will discover.

I am sure that you all know about, or can remember, Thomas the Tank Engine. Those of you who have been around my son recently, have heard him going around saying “responsible, reliable and really useful”, which is Sir Topham Hatt’s description of Thomas.

When I work with people in the martial arts it is my desire to provide a responsible, reliable and really useful product, which will in turn create responsible, reliable and really useful black belts and instructors.

The three traits often go hand in hand. People who take personal responsibility for their lives and their actions can be relied upon to honor their commitments and reach their goals. When someone takes personal responsibility for his or her life and tells you that he or she will do a thing, you can normally expect that it will get done in a timely manner and in the fashion that it was promised.

All of which brings me to the Law of Attraction. We have spoken about this before. The Law of Attraction simply states that we attract into our lives the people, events and circumstances that are congruent with our self belief systems. People who consistently achieve their goals are more apt to be given further responsibilities at work, because they can be relied upon to complete a task. Responsible, reliable and really useful people are sought out as leaders and managers.

Once a person decides to take responsibility for his or her actions,

reliability and usefulness are natural outgrowths of the decision.

I see this time and time again in the martial arts or at the University. Once we decide to get serious and make it our responsibility to acquire the skills or the grade that we desire, we take the initiative and become proactive. We invariably do more than is asked, are prepared ahead of time, have great attendance, and make good use of the time we have. Serious people work diligently, ask questions, help those around them and seek opportunities to learn.

One of the reasons I love the black belt rank test cycle is that as we get close to our Black belt rank tests, you can see see small groups of students getting together before and outside of class time to hone their skills. These people know that the rank test is their personal responsibility. The net result is that the students who have made it their personal responsibility to acquire the necessary skills, perform at a higher level and deliver a more skillful presentation on the day of the rank test.

The trickle down effect is that these people frequently inspire those around them and create synergy within the dojo community and re-energize the dojo. The synergy is a consequence of drawing others into the group and working together to produce a higher quality product....which makes these people responsible, reliable and really useful to everyone they meet.

There is something infectious, inspiring and motivational about the whole process and that makes me smile. ☺

Mentoring

One of my greatest satisfactions in life is seeing people succeed. I gave a presentation on the concept of mentoring to the Downtown Toastmaster's group last night and made the comment that mentoring is the art of being stunningly successful and completely anonymous. When we mentor people in life, we often do so for a short span of their journey or for a specific part of their lives and then they move on and our job is done. Mentors stand in the background and help their protégés to develop and acquire skills that will ensure success. It is the protégé who draws the adulation of praise for success....and this is exactly as it should be. Mentors are the quiet, unobtrusive advocates and facilitators of their protégés. Mentors are there when needed and offer guidance when asked for.

I see mentors as map readers, mine sweepers and lighthouses. They are map readers because they are further ahead on their own journey. They have been there, done that, got the T-shirt. They know the lay of the land, the obstacles, the pitfalls and the challenges that lie ahead for the protégé. They are mine sweepers precisely because they **do** know the challenges that lie in the road ahead, and they can offer suggestions that might help a protégé to avoid the obstruction and thereby achieve success sooner. In this way, mentors help their protégés to achieve success by drawing benefit from the life experiences of the mentor and not re-inventing the wheel.

Typically, protégés choose mentors whom they admire and respect and who can act as a guide. Frequently, the protégé wants to emulate some aspect of the mentor's character or success. The mentor in turn needs wisdom, tolerance, patience and above all compassion. Taken together this group of traits tend to make the mentor a lighthouse, or a beacon to safe harbor on a tumultuous ocean of life.

For a mentor to be useful, the protégé needs to have a plan and some idea of what it is he or she wishes to achieve. The mentor cannot provide the map, that is the responsibility of the protégé. It is difficult to mentor someone who has no idea of what he or she wants to achieve.

It is inevitable, however, that during the relationship the protégé will fall over and make mistakes. This is a necessary step in the process of learning. I cannot recall where I first heard it, but I truly believe we fail our way to success. I can think of hundreds of instances where I fell flat on my face or made the wrong choice in my own journey. But each choice has been a valuable lesson that I needed to learn to become the person I am. For sure, I am still on my journey, learning and making new mistakes. I therefore see failure as a necessary step in the learning process. Failure allows us to discover the ways that won't work and thereby draw us closer to the ways that will work. It also means that each person will have to make his or her own mistakes to learn the necessary lessons that will ensure eventual success. It is a lot like watching a child learn how to build a jig-saw. When we learn how to build jig-saws we make a lot of fitting errors. Later, we can simply look at the pieces and see the fit without even touching them. Then we pick up the correct piece and put it directly into place on the first attempt... we have become skillful...by making mistakes and learning what will work. When protégés make mistakes and fall over, the mentor is patient and tolerant. Often the mentor can see pitfalls ahead and might even give warnings of its impending arrival, but ultimately it is up to the protégé to successfully negotiate the obstacle....or not. It is not the mentor's job to put the jig-saw piece in its place, only the protégé can do that.

If mentors do their job well, the pro-

téég achieves success through synergy. Synergy occurs when a group of individuals combine their skills, knowledge, experience and talents to achieve more, sooner, than would have been possible if they had each acted alone. By drawing on the experiences of the mentor, the protégé can achieve higher levels of success, sooner.

Once the success has been achieved, it should be the protégé who draws the praise and the mentor should be in the background. Often people may never even know the role the mentor played in the life of the protégé. The mentor is invisible and anonymous...and this too, is exactly as it should be.

We can use mentors in all sorts of areas in our lives. Our mentors do not even have to know that we have chosen them. It might even be someone who is already dead. There are historical characters whose lives have inspired me. Even though I will never meet them, (like Shackleton from last month) they are mentors of a sort. By studying their lives I can draw lessons from their experience. Likewise I have mentors whom I have never met, but who are amazingly successful at what they do, so I study them and attempt to emulate their strategies on my own journey.

Ultimately only you can chart your course to success. A mentor can help you achieve success sooner, but it is your journey, no-one else can walk it for you.

Look around your life. Where do you need help? Where would a success coach speed your arrival to success in an endeavor? Are you too proud to ask? Are you too shy to ask?

If you look ahead on the road, you will see people in front of you and if you look behind you, there are people just setting out. We all need mentors if we choose to be successful in life. ☺

Potential Awareness

One of the things that I am most curious about concerns the limits of human potential. You may recall that a couple of months ago I used a quote from Nelson Mandela. The gist of the quote was that we are afraid not so much of failure in life so much of what might be capable of achieving. This is an interesting perspective because it implies that at some level at least, we are aware of the dormant potential that lies within each of us. If we never become our very best, will we ever know the consequences of that choice? If we become the very best that we can become....how will we know?

In my world view, martial arts training is about discovery and rediscovery of self. For many of us it is perhaps the first time we ever truly face ourselves, for others it is simply like peeling an onion.

I have said before that as I get older in the martial arts, I find the journey to be much more internal and spiritual rather than external and physical. Every time I overcome some weakness within me, another bubbles to the surface and requires that I face it too. Each successive challenge is harder than the last, just like Calculus was harder than Algebra. Over time, I slowly come to terms with my own weaknesses and demons and hopefully become better able to reach my true potential as a human. Do I have any idea what my potential really is? I'm not sure, I don't think so. But I will tell you that I have not yet achieved it!

So where does it all begin? I think

that the road to discovery begins with an awareness. Initially our awareness of self and of the world we live in is flawed and imperfect. As we grow, our awareness deepens.

As I seek to overcome my weaknesses and achieve my potential I begin to see the consequences of my self-limiting habits. We all have them....you know, the things that you do or say to yourself that hold you back in life. For instance: "I'm just a (fill in the blank), I could never be a (fill in the blank)". Or how about this: "I'm not very good at _____, it always confuses me." I get that one a lot on campus from students who don't think that they can master science.

O.K., fine, maybe we're not all talented and gifted at the same things, but each of us has unique skills and abilities that those around us see as a gift of some sort. This is as it should be. We are, after all, individuals.

So my sense of it comes to this: We are dimly aware of our true range of talents and gifts, we are mostly unaware of our potential and we hold ourselves back with negative internal dialogs and self-defeating habits.

What I am telling you in a roundabout way, is that I think that we begin to limit ourselves and lose sight of our natural talents and potential when we are very young.

As children, we learn very quickly that we are not good at certain things, where other kids are naturally gifted or talented. We measure ourselves against their yardstick, come up short and from that day forward we live in

the world of "try" and "can't".

I was chatting the other day with one of my instructors about how much we should value pre-school and kindergarten teachers. These people hold the future of our world in their hands every day and the gifted ones are always holding in front of the children an image of each child that is capable, useful and just beginning to discover what is possible in the world. Our pre-school teachers and kindergarten teachers lay the foundations of a child's life. To my way of thinking, these people should be some of the most highly paid, highly educated people in society...they are the custodians of the future.

What I would like to know is why we continue to hold ourselves back as adults, once we can see a greater potential than that which we have already achieved.

It's a curious thing.

I see it in my own life and I see it all around me. We get comfortable with who we are, what we do and what we achieve and we settle there. We become resistant to change and seemingly incapable of altering.

And yet, I firmly believe that given the right stimuli or incentives we can change our lives and become better than we had ever dreamed possible. This is something else that I see in my own life and in the lives of those around me. It all comes down to wanting to become aware, having the desire to put our past self image in the past and reaching for our potential.



You cannot dream yourself into a character;

you must hammer and forge one for yourself

- James A. Froude

Little red wagons

I was reading a book recently about parenting and the author used an interesting illustration. He compared a child's life to a little red wagon. It was a powerful metaphor to me and one that I would like to explore for a while with you.

Children often get a little red wagon as a gift of some sort and they get to put all sorts of things in it. They drag it around, leave out in the rain, charge downhill in it and crash it innumerable times in the name of play. The paint gets scratched, the sides get dented, the varnish wears off of the wooden handle, the metal gets rusty. Still, it is the focal point of untold games of magic and imagination and holds the deep memories of childhood. For my little boy, his little red wagon is a green John Deere tractor and trailer.

So if the little red wagon is your life...you get to put in it what you want and treat it how you wish. You are also responsible for dragging it around with you and ultimately what happens to it. No-one else can do this for you. It's your wagon, no-one else's. Everyone else has got their own wagon to deal with, without dragging yours around as well. There is a rather interesting point here concerning the fact that often we expect other people to get us out of the messes that we have created for ourselves. If it's my wagon, I should take care to use it in a responsible manner. But life is what it is and frequently we do not make wise choices and do the responsible thing every time...so the wagon gets beaten up over time and we have to drag around some baggage that we later regret, but is now a part of who we are.

No-one should expect to go through life without some damage from wear and tear and some less-than-judicious choices along the way. This is the way of things. So the question is this: Do we take responsibility

for what we have done with the resources and opportunities that were/are available to us. Are we willing to make changes to how we care for our little red wagons as we get older and, theoretically at least, wiser? We cannot change what we have already done to our wagons, but we can choose how we use them from this moment forward.

Raising children and teaching martial arts are not so very different to each other...it all comes back to creating the best possible outcome with the resources available, without giving the child (or the martial arts student) baggage from our own wagon. After all, everyone wants to put their own stuff in their own wagon...not drag around other people's stuff with them.

Which brings me to my closing point. We should be willing to respect and value the wagons with which we come into contact, after all, each of them has been on a unique journey of exploration and discovery. So the next time you want to chew someone's head off, look at their life as a little red wagon....you might just smile at them instead of snapping at them. ☺



April						
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- ◆ 3rd Ippon Open Judo Tournament, Peachtree City, GA, April 16th, 2005
- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS May 21st, 2005
- ◆ SMAA/PAF break a Thon, may 21st, 2005.
- ◆ Texoma Judo Camp, Wichita Falls, TX, June 6th-10th, 2005
- ◆ Charlotte Judo Camp, N.C., June 15th through 18th, 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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