

Pathways

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"Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all."

Dale Carnegie

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Knowing when to quit

This is a hard article for me to write, especially under current circumstances, but I have had this title in my "newsletter to do file", back in the subconscious part of my mind for some time. I often get an idea for an article and it has to ferment before it's ready to be written. This article is one of *those* articles.

Churchill made the famous statement: "Never quit, never, never, never quit."

On the lighter side Captain Quincy McTaggart in *Galaxy Quest* says: "Never give up. Never surrender."

So what's the message?

You could take it at face value and leave things there, but you know I won't do that; although there is a level at which that is exactly what it means.

If you have the desire to live a life of personal integrity, it isn't a sometime thing. If you are true to *your* core beliefs, whatever they are, then you have no choice but to hold true to them and never surrender that position. This is the better part of integrity. But that's not what we're talking about either.

What we're talking about is strategic and tactical living.

When is it better to take a tactical retreat to obtain a strategic objective? When do you walk away from something and when do you stick to your guns? When do you say enough is enough and when do you say I'm not nearly done yet?

How often do we give up just when things get toughest, rather than pushing on through the darkness? There's something Dante-esque about all of this. You have to go through the Inferno to find Elysium...or at least that's the promise.

So here, then is the crux of the matter...we push ahead, we strive, we thrive through adversity because we have faith...we believe in a better tomorrow in the face of a total lack of guarantees about life.

Heck, you won't even survive the challenge of livingso doesn't it all seem a bit foolish...all this smashing ourselves against adversity over and over in search of something better.

So why do it? Why not quit? Why not give up? All very good questions.

I think that we do it because deep in our core selves we know that there is more within us than we can possibly imagine. It takes a real challenge in life to draw our true abilities out of being merely potential ability to being active ability. You never know what you are capable of doing until you do it....well duh!

So this is why you don't quit. This is why you never give up when things get tough. You know in your heart that you're better than that.

O.K. enough about not quitting...when *do* you quit? Sometimes the currents of life tell us when to change course and take a different tack to our destination. Sometimes our resources are depleted and it is time to retreat, repair and revise...I like the word reconnoiter...especially if you look at its literal meaning "to re - know." But none of this is actually quitting...it's demonstrating wisdom in reality.

Life is an educational process, it's always and everywhere about learning. Every moment of every day is a new moment, un-lived, *un*experienced until NOW. How will you use your moments? ☺

Insistent versus Persistent

So I was teaching class the other day and told one of my students that he was too insistent in his technique. He asked me what the word meant. He knew about persistent but hadn't heard the word insistent before.

Leaving aside the obvious questions that shot through my mind at the time about today's educational environments, let's look at the difference between the two words for a moment.

Persistent: The idea that you keep going, you don't quit, you keep pushing ahead, consistently overcoming obstacles that inevitably occur along the way. Persistence implies a degree of adaptability, and an ability to roll with the punches. Persistence speaks to commitment determination, and dedication, not to mention self-belief and confidence.

Insistent: The word has some similar connotations, but there is a demanding quality about it. Insistent implies a degree of inflexibility and rigidity, if you wish. When my son is insistent, his mind is closed and he is going to get his point across, no matter what the outcome. Frequently, his insistent approach to a situation leads to negative consequences, simply because he was unwilling to listen to others or to consider that their needs might run contrary to his own. On the positive side of the equation, insistence also has qualities of determination, dedication to a cause and commitment to a position. Insistence requires total

self-belief and a sense of 'being right'. Insistence can imply an unwillingness to compromise.

Where insistence can get us into trouble is when we fail to consider the environmental cues of a situation. We forge ahead regardless of any new information that might be forthcoming. Our minds become closed to new ways of looking at things and we insist upon our point of view, despite the fact that someone might show us that our position is flawed in some way. The great quality of insistence is also its Achilles heel. Insistence works well, when you ARE right. But how often are we completely right? How often are we in possession of ALL the facts. I can think of any number of times in my life, when I have insisted upon my own path or position, only to find out later that I was wrong, or was missing some vital piece of information.

Of course, there are times when being insistent is critical to the successful outcome or completion of a task. Imagine attempting to work in a teaching environment where the teacher did not insist upon the correct answer to a problem set. Obviously the further up the educational pyramid we go, the more ambiguous the answers become, until we come up against the frontiers of knowledge. But it is our ability to investigate choice at the upper end of learning that is predicated upon the acquisition of a solid base of fundamental facts: Two plus two always equals

four. It's not open to debate.

If we take Newtonian physics as an example, we all accept the fundamental truths of our physical living: Light, Gravity, Movement...all these things obey the basic laws of physics as Newton explained them to us. Now if I throw myself out of an upper storey window and insist that I can fly, the reality of the result might be something other than I insist will happen. Newton's physics will determine the outcome.

When things get astronomically large or vanishingly small, physics gets a bit more complex...or relatively so. To insist that Newton's physics is correct under a different set of conditions, leads us into incorrect conclusions about the universe at large and about the sub-atomic world.

Conversely, when we are willing to examine other possibilities and information, we can extend our understanding of physics. This is especially true if we are not fixed (insistent) upon a specific answer.

There are times to be insistent, but they need to be tempered by experience and wisdom. There are times to be persistent and we discover them through living and an understanding of the currents of life. One of the critical elements of successful living is knowing when to insist and when to persist and knowing the difference between these moments. ☺

You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself. Galileo

Fighting the wall

I was teaching the kid's class yesterday and we were looking at how to escape from holddowns.

We examined ways of moving, how we create power to move and the results of our actions.

We talked about a lot of issues: Thinking on the move, bashing your head against a wall and overcoming seemingly imovable obstacles.

I can't speak for the kids but I had a blast. I love watching the children figure something out and then realize that they were being taught something else entirely. It's a lot like studying pineapples and then being told you were really investigating doorstops! Say what?

O.K. try this: A child is in a holddown and has been told to escape. The child pushes against his or her partner and one of two things happens: The child either escapes or eventually gives up. Often the first attempt at escape is unsuccessful. So if we are in the holddown, we repeat exactly the same action, but with a bit more force. It too, is unsuccessful and so we push with all we've got and if we are stronger than our partner, we escape, if not we admit that we are trapped. (We might say that we are being insistent!)

The problem is that all we were really doing was hitting the wall over and over, rather than finding ways around it, over it, under it or through it.

There is a maxim, which states that folly is to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result. If I hit my head into a wall and it hurts the first time that I do it, what are the chances that it will hurt the next time? Do I really need to find out? Do I really need to do it harder?

It's much the same with Judo, if something I do keeps getting me a result that I do not want, it's time to change what it is that I am doing. Wait. Isn't that true of life in general?

So let's go back to the child and the holddown. It's important for the child to discover that his or her power base is limited and that being helddown by someone bigger is not an insurmountable challenge. If I can't push the wall off of me, perhaps I can wiggle out from under it, or maybe get the wall to move off of me by its own volition. So we teach children to think about how and where they are being held down and what opportunities exist for them to move. We teach them to keep moving, testing positions and thinking until they find a weakness in the holddown that is large enough for them to escape. We teach them to think creatively.

O.K. so where does the pineapple and the doorstep come in?

So far in the class the children have been focusing upon the holddown,

we have introduced the concept of the futility of hitting the same wall in the same way again and again and now we change the thought process.

How many times in life are the walls we face really only things that we resist...like doing what we are told by our parents....clearing up our rooms, taking out the garbage, emptying the dishwasher....you get the idea.

It is a real charge to me to watch the kids suddenly see the metaphor. Holddown = parental instruction. Inability to escape = fighting the instruction.

How much easier does life become if we realign our forces and redirect our effort?

So the holddown games become a way of teaching our children's class how to avoid conflict at home and at school. Yes, we are learning martial arts skills, but we are also learning life skills, while doing a physical activity. Educators tell us that we learn best when all our learning modalities are engaged, so from my perspective as a martial arts instructor, if I can hide a message in a physical drill and then allow you to discover the message for yourself, then I am creating a deep learning opportunity.

Yesterday was one of those days in the kid's class and I just wanted to share that with you....

☺

*Should you shield the canyons from the wind storms,
you would never see the true beauty of their carvings.*

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Tilling the Soil

Here's an often-used analogy. The other week, I was chatting with one of my black belts about how we prepare ourselves for the next stage of our individual lives. Actually, that's not exactly accurate, it would be better to say that we were discussing how life prepares us for the next stage of our lives...if we allow it to do so. Specifically we were discussing how we learn more by embracing the current challenges that we each face.

During our discussions, I used the analogy of tilling the ground and preparing the soil for new growth. There's nothing new in analogy, it's in fairly common use, but as we talked, and as I was thinking later, I began to look at the idea a little more deeply than I had done, previously.

Anyone who gardens or farms, knows that the soil contains nutrients, which form part of a number of chemical and biological cycles. Continuous use of the soil for the same crop diminishes the nutrients and it is difficult to replace them artificially.

The soil needs churning, rest, enrichment and variety over time in order to remain fertile. Clearly, there needs to be a time when the soil remains fallow and given a chance to 'rest' rather being used continually, season after season. So much for the 'all work and no play' part of the analogy.

Let's look at the tilling part of the analogy:

There is also a sense that tilling the soil, breaks up the upper crust of the soil and mixes the lower layers with upper layers. Breaking up the

soil and mixing it can open up the soil and improve its ability to both absorb and transmit water.

Soil is alive in a very real sense and optimum health for a soil requires that it be tilled.

It may be the challenges of life that churn us about and upset us, but it is also the challenges of life that give us strength, wisdom, insight and renewed purpose.

Sometimes, as we struggle through our individual crises, it is difficult to see that we will be better, stronger or more capable after the event, than we were before we went through it.

If we do not give ourselves to the process of being tilled, it is difficult to draw the full benefit for the next cycle of cultivation. When we resist the tiller, we become inflexible and rigid, like the hard crust on a dry, parched soil. The surface *needs* to be broken up before the water and the nutrients can get into the soil.

How often in life, could I have benefited from learning this lesson a little sooner?

Let's look now at the enrichment part of tilling. During the challenges that we face in life, we are given vital jewels of experience that enrich us and teach us...if we are open to the process. As I said earlier, life is an educational experience, everyday there is something new to learn. In a lot of ways, the challenges that we face in life are crucibles of learning, they are the proving ground of what we know and what we are capable of learning under stress.

So what about variety? That's an interesting one. Have you ever

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wondered how many of your challenges in life come from a resistance to change? How many times do we resist doing things a new way and end up paying for our inflexible attitude? Life IS change, everyday it is full of change, and yet we want it to remain static and comfortable. Therein lies the error of our reason. We want stasis and security in a world where we have no idea what the next moment might bring. You are faced with two choices: Relax and flow with change or Resist change for all you are worth. I guess in some ways it comes back to the previous article about insistence and persistence. When we relax and adapt we exhibit the quality of persistence. When we resist change, it is possible that we are exhibiting the quality of insistence.

I think we have an opportunity here. Choice 1: Welcome the tiller and prepare for space for new growth and opportunity. Choice 2: Resist the tiller and get beaten up anyway...because like it or not, life is not always a bed of roses!





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