

# Pathways

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**Q: Who would you be, if you could be the greatest person in history?**

**A: I'd be the George Bernard Shaw I could have been**

**From an interview with George Bernard Shaw towards the end of his life.**

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## Making Your Own Lunch

Two construction workers were sitting on a high girder and opened their lunch boxes for a break. One construction worker pulls out his sandwich and looks at it with disgust. "Damn, bologna again!" He goes on: "Every day for the last twelve years, bologna on white, bologna on white...it's always the same." The other construction worker suggests that he ask his wife to make him something different for a change. The first construction worker comes back with the comment: "How would that help? I'm not married and I make my own lunch."

There's a message here about how we live our lives. All too often it is easy to look at our lives and be unhappy about our jobs, our relationships or our health. The fact is though, we created it all.

Each day, the choices we make govern what will become of us. Sometimes they are little choices, sometimes big. Sometimes we can see that a choice will have a big impact (starting a new job, starting a family, making a mid-life course change). Sometimes the choices can be seemingly insignificant (heading to the office five minutes earlier than usual) and yet end up having profound effects that we did not foresee (having a life-changing car accident). Sometimes we just keep making the same lunch over and over...we don't really like it, but we keep making it nevertheless.

So what's a person to do? Do you risk change? Do you keep making the same lunch? Do you get someone else to take the decision away from you

and have them make your lunch for you? Do you stop eating lunch? Do you take someone else's lunch? Do you start eating out for lunch? Do you get up later and call it breakfast? Do you keep making your own lunch and continue complaining that you don't like it?

You see, there are many ways to answer the question. But no matter what answer you choose you must begin with one statement and a question:

"It's my lunch, I made it."

"Do I like my lunch and if not, how do I want to change it?"

It is not easy to chart a path through life; we are not all-seeing creatures and can easily become lost in a sea of choices. Sometimes we can simply get derailed by the unexpected. Equally, things are not always the way we think they are. For all these reasons, it is understandable that we can find ourselves faced with the same unappetizing lunch.

Even so, life comes at us every moment of every day and time slips by while we spin our wheels eating the same lunch that we made for ourselves and which we don't like.

So, once again it comes down to risk and reward. We can risk a new adventure and possible failure/success or we can stay put. Either scenario involving risk may generate feelings of fear...and so we stay put...trapped by our own comfort zone. Which, may in fact, hold a greater risk that we did not see.

Remember then, that to do nothing is to do something. You have to decide not act, just as you have to decide to act. What's for lunch? ☺

## Possible, probable, preferable

When synchronicity shows up in my life, I tend to pay attention. I have been listening to a set of CD's about trend analysis and prediction forecasting in the which the author was talking about the 3P's of prediction...hence the title of this article.

Well, as things unfold in this amazing piece of the space-time fabric I call my life, I was barely into my office this morning when the three P's showed up in a conversation with a graduate student. Later in the day, when I was at the business they cropped up again. Curious thing, life is.

So what's all this about. Well it's really quite simple.

In any situation that projects into the future there are three ways of looking forward. There are all the things that are possible in both ideal and non-ideal worlds, that which is probable given the current conditions, and that which is preferable given my goal set.

Let's set a series of starting conditions and examine your current health and fitness. Let's say that you are training in the martial arts and coming to class at least twice a week and sometimes three times a week. Let's say that you are close to your optimum weight, eat modest meals, eat close to nature, don't smoke and limit surfing the internet or watching T.V. to less than one hour per day... Yeah, I know, but indulge me here. Now, if that's what you are doing now, what were you doing five years ago? How does the lifestyle compare? Chances are you have been health conscious for a long time. Your habits were things that grew over time, they didn't just happen.

Now, let's take a peek into your future. We can examine what is possible, probable and preferable.

What is possible?

We need a little more information. Let's say you are currently a green belt student, twenty plus years old, and have been training for eighteen months. Let's also say that it normally takes three to four years to earn a black belt. Let's also say that you do not compete in your martial art at any level and do not go to clinics and seminars or train in anything outside of class.

So where does that leave us? What is *possible*? Is it possible that you could be a black belt inside a year? Yes, it is possible. Is it possible that you will still be a green belt at the end of a year? Yes, it is possible. Is it possible that you will quit training? Yes. Is it possible that you will decide to start competing? Yes. Is it possible that outside factors could interfere with your training that you could not, or did not, foresee? Again, yes.

So all these things are possible...but what is *probable*?

Well, if nothing changes about your current situation, then in one year you will probably be a brown belt, about as fit as you are currently, more skilled in technique, but not a competitor.

Now project out three, five and perhaps even ten years. What do you see ahead of you?

So the next question becomes: Is that where you want to be? If so, great...keep going. If not, where do you want to be?

The next logical step is to decide how far your *probable* destination is from your *preferred* destination and what you can do about it.

There are some things you can control, for instance: How much you train. How serious you get. How well you eat. How well you take care of yourself. Whether or not you decide to compete. Whether you go to clinics and seminars.

There are some things you cannot control: Available training partners during class. The time-in-grade ranking cycle. Tournament results if you compete. Unpredictable events (Black Swans...odd things you don't expect).

Now let's get to preferable. What is preferable? You have to know what you want to achieve. I cannot speak for your situation, but let's say you want to be a black belt candidate within twelve months. That's your goal.

It is preferable, but given your current training regimen, it is neither probable, nor possible.

So what would make it possible or even probable? What do you have to change?

What makes becoming a black belt candidate possible and achievable?

Training harder. Getting *really* serious. Getting involved in competition...possibly, because it will give you a

litmus test of your true ability in a simulated combat environment. Going to clinics and seminars, definitely...because you will be exposed to new, and different, people who train in the same style, but perhaps in different ways.

Will doing any of these things *guarantee* your goal? Nope. They will, however, make it more likely. You move from a very slim possibility into a chance of probability.

What if your goal is to become a nationally-ranked competitor and a black belt within a year? I suppose there is a remote chance that it is possible, but only if you have staggering amounts of untapped talent, a willingness to sacrifice everything for a year and do nothing but train, which for most of us is unrealistic.

All of which brings us back to one of my favorite topics: Goal Setting. Understanding what is possible, what is probable if things don't change and what is your preferred outcome is a valuable exercise, if for no other reason than it keeps us grounded in a reality-based world and yet challenges us to stretch beyond our established limits.

It is all too easy to accept the status quo and never reach our potential. It is also too easy to establish goals that have no basis in reality, given our current starting conditions, and which, we ultimately abandon.

Let me leave you with this scenario: I was a decent regional competitor and a half-decent national player in Judo. I am in the second half of my century and a black belt. Let's say I set a goal for myself about achieving a berth on the next Olympic Judo team. Oh, quit laughing! Apart from the obvious impediments of training and age, there are the Black Swans to consider....Judo was pulled from the Olympics after the last games. Was it foreseeable? Yes. Was it really a Black Swan? No, not if you were watching the trends. Could I change that outcome? No.

So when all is said and done, understand what is possible, probable and preferable in your life. Understand that you cannot control all outcomes, but know what you can control. Having said all of that. Look at any area of your life and apply the three P's. Enjoy. ☺

## Areas of Control

There are two areas of our lives...there are those things that we can control and those things over which we can exert no control. The boundary between those two sets may seem to be a little fuzzy, but you definitely know when you hit one.

I can control a car while I'm driving...right up until the moment that I can't. There's not a lot of doubt when that moment arrives. It's a lot like throwing in Judo, I can control where I step, how much force I use, how I grip...right up until the moment that I lose control to my partner and gravity becomes his ally. Worse than that; even if I am successful at throwing my partner in a tournament, I cannot control what score, if any, a referee will award. After all, s/he may or may not have been paying attention, or been in the right place, or have the understanding of what just happened.

What else?

How about exams in school? I hear students tell me frequently that their grades would have been higher if only (.....).

I have students with seemingly everything going for them fail tests, and I have seen people for whom the material is not so easy meet exactly the same test and astonish themselves with the result. It all comes down to taking the test or letting the test take you. Either you prepare or you don't. Either you do everything that you can to *influence* the outcome or you don't. You notice I didn't say

*control*. As a student, you cannot prevent me from setting an exam that is impossible, but assuming that I am giving reasonable tests of the course material, you can do a lot to influence your performance outcome.

The same applies in a job. You cannot control the economy or whether your corporation chooses to downsize its employee pool. You can do a lot to influence your value to the company and not be one of the first people who is downsized.

So what *can* you control?

Not a lot.

You can control your choices, your goals and your thoughts. O.K., so maybe controlling your thoughts is a tall order. Maybe controlling your first impulse thought is a bit difficult, but controlling your second thought is easier.

The point to all of this is that when we claim ownership of what is happening in our lives, we may not be able to control what happens, but we can certainly exert more influence over what happens.

I suppose this is where self-discipline enters the picture. We all exert some level of self-discipline in our choices, and probably, we all have areas where we lack self-discipline.

When we abdicate our responsibility to someone or something else, however, we give up any chance of control. So let's say I need to save money for a new car, but I just can't help buying that daily cup of Starbucks finest

brew. I am giving up the basic cost of the coffee *plus* the compound interest on each cup of coffee *for the life of my savings*. There's no point whining that I can't afford a new car. I cannot control how much compound interest will accrue on the account, but I can surely control what percentage of my money I set aside in each pay period for my car. It's not the money that's the problem, or the price of cars, or the economy...it's me. If I can control my urge to buy that espresso five days a week, I can probably add almost \$100 extra to the principal of my car buying fund every month. It's my choice. I control the choice, the action and therefore, to a large extent, the result.

How about another example? I can control what I eat, whether I exercise and whether or not I choose to enjoy vibrant health. Again, for sure, there are environmental and genetic factors over which I can exert little, if any control. My dietary and exercising habits, however, can dramatically lower my risk of diabetes, heart disease, premature aging, some mental illnesses and stress-related illnesses.

I suppose it all comes down to asking the question: What are you willing to take ownership of in your life? ☺

## Keys to Success

How do you know you are successful? Seems like a simple enough question, and in many ways it is. What is harder though, is the task of guiding someone towards their own success in life...or maybe putting your own feet upon that path. I have thought about this a lot over the last few years. What does it take to be successful?

There are about half a dozen indispensable qualities that I could use to define the qualities possessed by almost all the successful people I have met.

1. **Passion.** Don't leave home without it. You have to love what you do. Without passion, you may be good, but you will never excel.
2. **Talent.** Yes, you do need aptitude at what you do.
3. **Vision.** You need a picture of what it is that you seek. You need clarity of purpose. Purpose allows us to set goals and organize our plans.
4. **Tenacity.** The desire to keep going, despite adversity, setbacks, opposition and the seemingly impossible.
5. **Hope.** The internal belief that

the journey and the destination are both worth the effort.

6. **Faith:** The internal belief in yourself to achieve the goals you set. Your belief in yourself and your place in the cosmos.

So...are you living your passion? What is your passion? Are you using your skills and talents to their best advantage? Do you know your list of skills and talents? Do you have measurable goals that will lead you to an achievable result? How hard are you willing to work to get there? How much effort is enough?

Are you worth it?

The last question will be the roof of your achievement. Whatever it is that you do, you will allow yourself to go no further than you believe that you have the ability to go...*even if your potential is greater.*

I have seen this countless times over the years at the university and in my business. I see talented, capable, bright people who stop short because they lose faith in their ability. Perhaps it is self-doubt. Perhaps it is fear of success. Perhaps it is an ingrained belief system that tells them that they do not have the ability (despite any and all evi-

dence to the contrary). It doesn't matter. Whatever the reason, we will only rise as far as we believe ourselves capable of rising.

One of the questions people ask me at this stage in my life is something akin to the following: If money were no object, what would you do in life? It's a good question. Ask yourself the same question. Does the answer pop into your mind right away?

If you know the answer, are you doing it? If not, are you on the right path? What's holding you back? What can you do about any of the things that are holding you back?

Don't wait a lifetime to find out.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ **AKAYAMA FALL CLINIC. STARKVILLE, MS. NOVEMBER 21ST WEEKEND, 2009.**

Men are wise in proportion, not to their experience, but to their capacity for experience.

George Bernard Shaw

You see things and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were and I say "Why not?"

George Bernard Shaw

SEEING  
*and*  
BEING



*Collected Poems By*  
CHRIS DEWEY

**Available soon. We are taking orders NOW for  
Chris' third book of poetry and photography.**

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